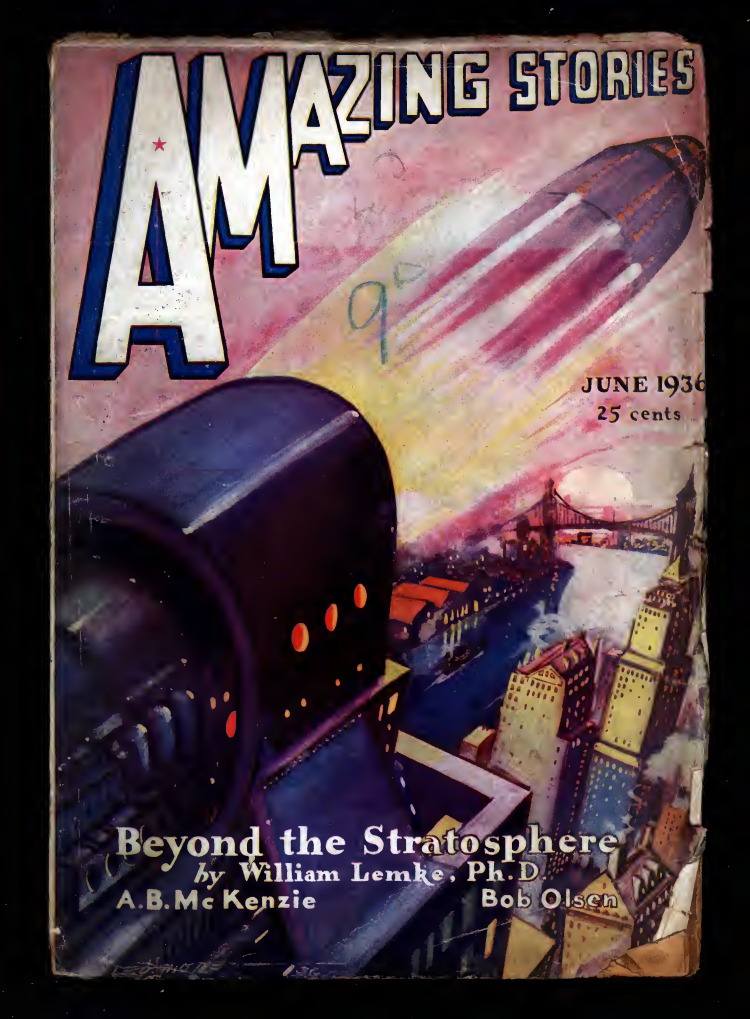


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Beyond the Stratosphere

by William Lemke, Ph.D.

A.B. McKenzie

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AMAZING STORIES

Science Fiction

Vol. 10

JUNE, 1936

No. 10

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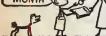
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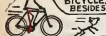
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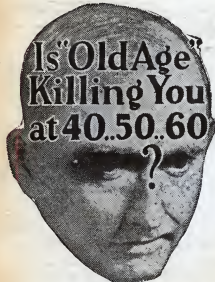
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T. O'CONOR SLOANE, Ph.D., Editor
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The Ether and Ether Waves

T. O'CONOR SLOANE, Ph.D.

WE have frequently had occasion in these Editorials to remark upon the large and the small in this universe, in which mankind has his being, and in which if he were not so intent upon vindicating his importance by killing off his co-terrestrials in considerable quantity, and showing his patriotism by impoverishing his own country by so doing, he might have a pleasant enough existence. But one great ruler tells us that war ennobles a nation. Patriotism, which has the advantage of being impersonal, is called upon to induce people to fight. If we take in the insignificance of the earth as a celestial body it hardly seems logical to fight and kill a few of its inhabitants to determine the possession of an insignificant fraction of so small a thing as the earth.

Nearly twelve millions of spheres the size of the earth would fit in between it and the sun. Held to its elliptical course through space by the mystical force of gravitation, exercised by the sun, with some trivial gravitational pulls from itself and other celestial bodies, it has gone on a peaceful course with little variation for ages. We know that its path is an ellipse of slight degree of eccentricity. This is one of the four simple curves known as the conic sections. The fact that the path of the earth is an ellipse tells us that its distance from the sun varies slightly. When it is at the shortest the earth has to move a little faster to generate an increase in centrifugal force to keep it away from our great luminary. The variation is expressed by the law that the imaginary lines reaching from earth to sun, elliptical radii-vectors, pass over the same areas in the same spaces of time. Nothing could be simpler. It is impressive seen in the light of that slight variation. Yet without this variation in velocity, it is not hard to form a surmise of what

would become of us and our little ball of an earth. We would be drawn into the sun in short order.

All this is simple enough—the relations of earth to sun and of the other eight or more planets; for there is no conviction that all are known to us. Then we come to the earth itself, of which we certainly know a good deal, and of which there remains much to be studied, out and determined with certainty. For we are pretty definitely restricted to the surface of the earth, and to a very small distance above it, not much in excess of ten or twelve miles, while, as for going down into it, a distance of a mile and a half brings our researches to an end in that direction. The earth is about eight thousand miles in diameter, so we have done very little when we can only explore a little over one thousandth of its diameter in a perpendicular direction. If we try to ascend to a height of over ten miles, the rarefied air will not support life, so in a sense we live in a shell, whose action or rather inaction at great heights operates to hold us to the surface. As far as man's physique is concerned we know that we must have air and enough of it if we are to live. We theorize *ad libitum* about the atmosphere and its actions, and these actions are rather impressive. Then if we could go into outer space what would we find there? As near as we can surmise it would be virtually nothing, as far as we are concerned, it would be a perfect vacuum. This is all on the face of it, as the saying is: For what goes on in space? The first answer would be nothing. But we are held bound to our ellipse as we go around the sun, completing the ellipse in a little over the standard year. The earth generates a great centrifugal force, just as a stone at the end of a cord does whirled

around in a circle. The sun attracts the earth across the nearly one hundred millions of miles separating the two bodies. And the same attraction keeps distant Pluto in the path of its ellipse encircling the sun. It is the force of gravity exercised across millions of miles that holds Pluto and Mercury on their paths, as well as the other planets, planetoids and satellites of our solar system. There is hardly anything harder to theorize about than gravity. That tremendous force goes through space and reaches the most extreme regions or distances. We cannot assert that gravity is what space can do; for space probably has nothing to do with it, but gravity acts through the inconceivable distances of space; as truly as a bar pushes or a rope pulls, gravity doing the pulling however, for it does not push.

It is fair to say that nothing in the physical world is more obscure than attraction or repulsion of masses not in contact and in no sense materially connected with each other. This would apply to all magnetic or electric actions. It is all very well to use the fiction of lines of force. These help in the description and calculation of such interactions, but they cannot be accepted as realities. The question naturally presents itself, as to what is inherent and present in all substances, in all forms of matter, which makes them attract each other. Without the force of gravity how long would our atmosphere stay with us? The air is denser near the earth than at great heights, for gravitation pulls harder the closer the attracting bodies are to each other. It is in everything, so that the atmosphere attracts the earth as truly as the earth attracts the atmosphere. The earth attracts the sun, and the sun attracts the earth. There is complete reciprocity or mutual action be-

tween masses of matter. Each attracts the other. As far as we know there is nothing in space to develop or create the universal attraction of gravitation. It is a plain mystery.

Light is another phenomenon which has the same power of traversing space that is possessed by gravity. But it can be cut off by the simplest screen. Gravity does not yield so easily. A sheet of paper may shut off light, but it cannot do this for gravity.

It is perfectly fair to say that whatever theories may be evolved there is no way of satisfactorily accounting for the attraction of gravitation. Even if it were to be taken as a form of cohesion, that would not help much, as cohesion implies extremely close propinquity and may be attributed to molecular closeness, which for us is infinite approach. It is a name for something we do not understand.

And there is another transmission through space, with which in a very limited range of its action we are so familiar, that though it is one of the wonders of the universe, most of us never gave it a thought, but go on using it, and if we become so affected that it ceases to act for us, we miss it terribly. It is light alluded to above.

Space, almost empty as far as solid matter is concerned, is assumed to be filled with an extremely tenuous thing called the ether, it is hardly proper to use the word substance, and the ether has assigned to it the property of being thrown into waves. These waves are taken to be of the most varied lengths. They may be produced in the ether by various means, and of an enormous range of lengths. The ether is thrown into waves by the radio transmitter or broadcaster, as it is often called. These waves are varied by the operators to suit the circum-

stances of the case. They may be measured in feet and inches when they come down to inch dimensions, they constitute short wave radio. But this is only the beginning of ether waves. A millimeter is approximately one twenty-fifth of an inch, it is one thousandth of a meter, the latter a little over thirty nine inches. In what were epoch-making experiments the German physicist, Hertz, produced ether waves varying in length from nine thousand millimeters down. He found that they traversed space and could go through a wall. These are called Hertzian waves in honor of Professor Hertz. So now we have come from waves measurable in feet or in meters to waves only a few millimeters in length.

If we start with the shortest Hertz wave, which has a length of 4 millimeters, we enter what is termed the infra-red region of ether waves. This brings us into the wave-lengths, which are measured by the extremely minute unit called the angstrom, named from the eminent physicist of Sweden, A. J. Angström. If we go down the scale of these units starting with the millimeter which is about one twentyfifth of an inch, we first have the micron one thousandth of a millimeter; next comes the millimicron, the millionth of a millimeter, and the tenth of this last unit is the angstrom. The wave lengths keep going down the scale, using the angstrom unit, to still shorter dimensions until we come to the wave length of seven thousand six hundred angstroms, which, as we go down to the shorter waves, is the conclusion of the infra-red. In this part of the wave band or spectrum heat is present, unaccompanied by light, but when the seventy six hundred angstrom wave length is reached, light appears, red in color, with heat in its

rays, but relatively little power of inducing chemical change. Then as the waves decrease in length, they change in the color produced. As they become shorter, they increase in chemical power and produce one by one the colors of the solar spectrum or of the rainbow; finally when they diminish to the length of thirty nine hundred angstroms, they produce a violet color, with increase in power of producing chemical changes, next they cease to produce light, and the long succession of shorter and shorter waves up to forty angstroms gives the ultra-violet band of invisible waves, ranging from thirty nine hundred down to forty angstroms. These rays produce chemical changes with relatively high power, and are responsible for the tanning of the epidermis of fair bathers at the seashore.

The next band of the spectrum is composed of still shorter wave-lengths, and from the forty angstrom wave down to a one angstrom wave we have the X-rays. The short ultra-violet rays can produce inflammation on some more sensitive skins, but the shorter X-rays are far more powerful in their effect, can produce incurable deterioration of the tissues of the body, and have killed a number of experimenters and investigators, for in the early days of their investigation their danger had not been found out. Screens or armor of lead are a partial protection from the ill effects of X-rays, and are used by operators.

After the X-rays come the gamma rays, ranging in length from one angstrom to two fifths of an angstrom and then come the cosmic rays some even less in length than two one-hundredths of an angstrom.

Sound is produced by the vibration of any number of things. It is transmitted over long distances, as things

are reckoned on the earth. We are most familiar with it as it is conducted, or better, as it is transmitted, by air, in which it travels at the rate of about one fifth of a mile in a second. Lights acts so much like sound, that as we speak of the waves of sound, we also refer light to waves. But as light travels or is transmitted almost a million times faster than sound is transmitted in air, we have to invent something a million times lighter than air to transmit waves at the rate of one hundred and ninety six thousand miles in a second. This hypothetical thing we call the luminiferous ether. It is assumed to do its work by the action of waves, and it is these ether waves which we have been reading about in these lines. And we do not know if there is such a thing as the luminiferous ether, as it is called, because it is only a theoretical substance man has invented or more properly imagined, to serve as vehicle for the transmission of light through space. The word luminiferous means light-bearing. But it is a theoretical substance. The waves of the radio are assumed to be ether waves so long that they can be specified in feet of length.

The speed of transmission of ether waves is so great that they can go around the earth in seven seconds. This figure is obtained by dividing the speed of ether waves by the circumference of the earth. A radio wave has to go a little more than the circumference of the earth in going around it, as it starts out for outer space, is reflected back by an atmospheric layer, then is again reflected from the earth and so on until it goes all the way around in a sort of saw-tooth pattern. If a man were speaking in a twenty-five foot room, the radio would carry his words to Australia, in about the time it would take for

the air to carry the sound-waves across the place. The Australian would get the message as soon as the persons in the back of the room.

The chemical action of ether waves is greatest in the violet and ultra-violet lengths. It is chemical action which tans the skin of the human body, and the same rays act with most power on the photographic plate or film. But films are now being produced which

will give results in the invisible infra-red as well as in the invisible ultra-violet ranges.

Every movement we make, everything we do is affected by or depends upon gravitation. Everything we see depends upon light for our seeing it. It is fair to say that light and gravitation are pretty close to being insoluble puzzles. Knowing the laws they follow does not tell us what they are.

Science Questionnaire

1. How many earths could span the distance from earth to sun? (See Page 8)
2. What simple geometrical relation gives the varying speed of the earth? (See Page 8)
3. Is it certain that we know how many planets there are? (See Page 9)
4. Do we know what gravity is? (See Page 10)
5. What transmits light and how fast? (See Page 10)
6. Describe the spectrum from radio waves to cosmic ray waves. (See Pages 10-11)
7. What velocity would a solid body require to break away from the earth's gravitational attraction? (See Page 15)
8. What causes the diffusion of the sun's light so as to give daylight? (See Page 19)
9. What effect has the atmosphere on the radiated heat of the sun? (See Pages 20 & 37)
10. Could there be a bonfire in a vacuum? (See Page 24)
11. How many branches has the trigeminal nerve? (See Page 47)
12. Give a synopsis of its connections and functions. (See Page 47)
13. Is the sun a star? (See Page 75)
14. Is there any possibility of the planet Mercury becoming cool enough for existence of life? (See Page 75)
15. What is the general status of the cosmic system? (See Page 77)
16. On what is the planet Mars supposed to depend for water? (See Page 77)
17. What is the possible origin of asteroids? (See Page 77)
18. How many satellites has the planet Mars? (See Page 77)
19. What is the name of the system of the sun, planets and satellites? (See Page 78)
20. What is a good term for the moon? (See Page 79)
21. What is to be said of the 'other side' of the moon? (See Page 80)
22. What is pitchblende and its use? (See Page 97)
23. What frequent error applies to the idea of Frankenstein? (See Page 117)

Beyond the Stratosphere

By WILLIAM LEMKIN, Ph.D.

A Serial in Two Parts

One may wonder how many people, listening to a radio from some distant point perhaps half way around the globe, stop to think why the message or music takes this curved course, instead of going straight out into space. It is because in the upper atmosphere there is a layer that reflects it back to earth, and here we are told of a layer above the stratosphere, but remember it is fiction. Things aloft are not exactly as described in Doctor Lemkin's tale.

PART I

"ANOTHER rocket has disappeared," remarked Bob Hart dryly as he entered. He flung his leather cap in a corner, helped himself to a cigarette from the pocket of my service jacket hanging nearby, and sank into a chair.

"Just vanished vamoosed swallowed up," he elucidated between puffs.

"Which makes the sixth rocket in less than two weeks, doesn't it?" I remarked thoughtfully.

"Six is right, Earl," was the reply, "and this last ship was the prize one of the whole lot. We the boys over at the shops and myself worked like Trojans on her for the better part of a week. And she cost good old Stratosphere Transport, Inc., a pretty penny to build and equip with all those gadgets and thingumbobs and doodads required for this test flight."

"And now she's gone the way the other five have," I said with a slightly bitter laugh. "If Stratosphere Transport, Inc., persists in lavishing thousands of dollars on these darn fool experiments—these *super-altitude* test flights—it's likely to find itself on the rocks; . . . and among others, there's

going to be a crackerjack rocket mechanic called Bob Hart out of a job"

"Not to mention," interjected Bob merrily, "a certain, highly competent stratosphere pilot by the name of Earl Norton."

A few chuckles, and then we grow serious again.

"What's the dope about the latest disappearance, Bob?" I asked.

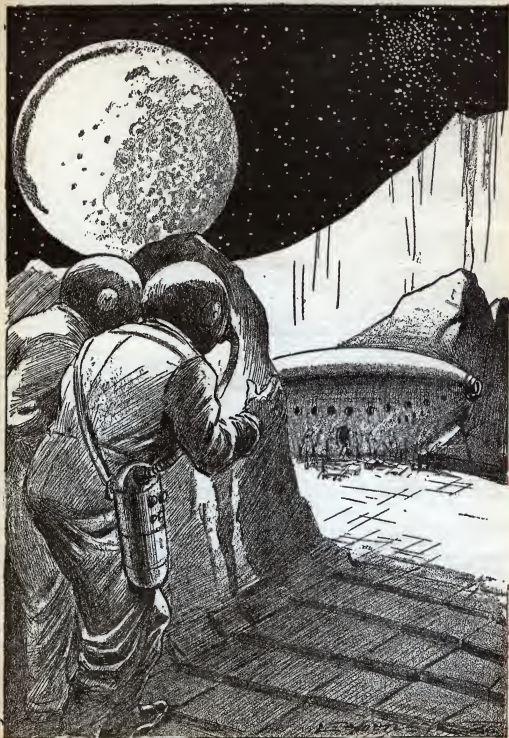
"Very little different from the other five. The rocket was shot off in just the same way that the rest were dispatched. It was equipped with the very latest in altitude recorders, maximum and minimum thermometers, compartments for samples of atmosphere, instruments for measuring cosmic rays, ultra-violet rays, infrared rays and what not."

"And the parachute equipment, of course?"

"Naturally but we might just as well have kept that down here on earth, for all the good it did."

"No trace of any return, eh?"

"None whatever, Earl. We sent her off as neatly and beautifully as you please, and that's the last anybody has ever seen of her. The company had watchers scattered over a large area of the surrounding country as



The sixth, which I immediately recognized from its size and general appearance as the latest of the vessels to have disappeared into space, lay by itself somewhat off to the side.

well as out at sea. There must have been two hundred individual observers detailed to watch for the rocket when she came down—more than four times the number employed for any of the previous altitude rockets. And not to mention the thousands of unofficial lookouts eager to spot the returning projectile. But not a single word of news from any of them."

"What about the fuel?"

"She carried enough *benzite* and liquid oxygen to bring her to an altitude of well over a hundred miles."

"And the other five test rockets? What of their fuel?"

"Sufficient for about the same altitude—that is, from our calculations, which may or may not be all wrong. Hang it all, Earl, that's where the whole mystery lies! We've sent any number of test rockets aloft since the research department of Stratosphere Transport initiated this series of super-altitude experiments. They've all returned to earth with recorded elevations of 70, 80, 100, 115 miles. Everything going smoothly—no hitch in our tests—and then we increase the range—and presto! . . . the rockets never come back!"

"They couldn't possibly have left the earth's gravitational attractions and become wanderers in space, could they Bob?"

"Ridiculous, Earl . . . and you know it! In order for those projectiles to break away from the earth's pull, they need a speed of nearly *seven miles per second*. And so far we haven't been able to make a rocket big enough and strong enough to hold the necessary fuel for attaining such a speed."

"Maybe they encountered meteors at that great height and were destroyed?"

"It doesn't seem likely that all of

them should have collided with meteors. If it were only a matter of one lone rocket disappearing, then I'd say meteors. But *six* of them? . . . Not a chance, Earl. And even granting the impossible—even though they *were* smashed by striking a mass of flying matter at that altitude, wouldn't you expect that there would be some sort of wreckage falling back to earth? But not a piece of any of them has returned—not a *splinter*!"

"By thunder, Bob, it's got *me*!"

"Me too, Earl, and all of us over at the rocket shops as well. The department chief is all het up about it, and the Big Boss himself must be losing plenty of sleep over the entire business."

"Mystery or no mystery, Bob, I think the company ought to quit wasting time and money on these stunts. The primary job on our hands is just what our name stands for—*stratosphere transport*. The company engineers have perfected upper altitude point-to-point rocket flight so that it has become fool-proof and dependable. New York to Chicago in an hour—to Los Angeles in less than three hours—to Paris, Moscow, Buenos Aires at a thousand-mile-an-hour speed through the upper atmosphere. Stratosphere Transport, Inc., has a monopoly of stratosphere transportation, and should bend all its efforts to improving its physical equipment, to perfecting its service, to developing methods and devices that would aim to make stratosphere flight even more fool-proof and more reliable than it is now—if that is at all possible—instead of poking away at unattainable altitudes and fantastic dreams of interplanetary conquest."

"Bravo, Earl! . . . a very pretty speech. Bravo again! . . . Maybe you can convince the research department

of Stratosphere Transport saying that they're all washed up on this high altitude business and then again, maybe you cain't."

"Of course, Bob, I'm only a pilot, and not a scientist or a research engineer and so my argument probably won't cut much ice. But I still think that all these expensive experiments are a huge waste, no matter which way you look at them. Any high school kid can tell you that space-flight and interplanetary travel, with our present materials and equipment, is just a myth—that it will remain such until we discover a radically new building material for our rockets and a fuel that is five times as powerful as the *benzite*-oxygen mixtures now in use."

We lapsed into silence for a few moments, interrupted only by a steady drumming, as Bob beat a thoughtful tattoo with his finger tips on the arm of his chair. Clouds of cigarette smoke trailed lazily upward. Each of us was engrossed in his own musings.

Bob broke the silence. There was eagerness in his voice and tenseness in his manner as he leaned toward me.

"Those six rockets were sent aloft, weren't they? they didn't come back, did they? they didn't hit a meteor or something and crack up, did they? they couldn't have escaped from the earth's attraction and sailed off into space, could they? Then what's the only remaining possibility?"

"Why you don't mean that those six rockets are still why, Bob you're !"

"No, I'm not crazy, Earl! and you've guessed my theory. *Those rockets are still up there!* My opinion is that they have encountered some

kind of obstruction at those altitudes "

"And very probably been smashed to smithereens by the encounter, eh? . . . Pshaw! . . . Absurd . . . !"

" . . . or else they have entered the zone of some mysterious force or ray that has stopped their flight and holds them suspended between earth and sky!"

"What a theory! And now you're going to tell me that the only way to get them back is to sail up there, unhook them from whatever force is detaining them, and tow them all back to earth"

"You've guessed it, old man! That's my notion to the letter. The only way we'll ever know what's become of the missing ships is to go up there and look for them—and, it's dollars to doughnuts, we'll find 'em just where they got tangled up in this paralyzing force."

"Doesn't that mean sending a manned rocket-ship up to an altitude at least three times as high as ever attained by a human being?"

"Yes and what of it? We have the equipment, we have the necessary fuel. We've sent any number of test rockets to nearly that altitude, and they have returned safely. I'm sure it can be done—and I for one would like to be a member of the crew that takes that rocket up."

"And I for *another*, wouldn't care for any such trip. When it comes to gallivanting about through the stratosphere, why, I feel perfectly at home. But as for the wide open spaces beyond not for *this* comparatively earthbound mortal!"

Bob jumped up from his seat and grabbed his greasy cap from the corner where he had flung it.

"I still think this idea of mine is a swell one," he blurted, as he made

a dash for the door, "and I'm going to see it through, if I don't do another thing in my life."

"Where to in such a terrible hurry?" I inquired in amusement.

"To see the Big Chief himself," he fired back, "and spill this grand idea of mine!"

With his head poking back grotesquely through the doorway he launched his final shot:

"I may be back before long . . . with an *invitation!* . . . and maybe you'll change your mind!"

SURE enough, Bob Hart came trooping into my room early the next morning, in high glee.

"We're taking No. 43!" he exploded.

"Who is taking No. 43 where?" I inquired sharply.

"Why, Earl, you don't mean to tell me that you've forgotten all about it already?"

"No, I haven't forgotten all about it, but—what have you got up your sleeve now?"

"Well, I went to see the Big Chief as I said I would. Say Earl, that fellow's a brick, if ever there was one. Probably doesn't know me from any of the other mechanics over at the shop, but he listened to everything I had to say. And, would you believe it, Earl, in less than half an hour I had him all worked up over the idea. Called in a couple of his right-hand men, and had me go over the whole thing once more. We had a real pow-wow together—and now it's all fixed for tomorrow."

"So they agreed to this lunatic flight of yours?"

"You bet they did. They've given me No. 43 for the trip. The boys are going over her right now, installing extra fuel tanks and checking up on

the controls. Of course, there will have to be a pilot along—I'm only a rocket mechanic—a pretty rotten one at that—and—well, Earl—they've got it all arranged . . ."

"What are you driving at?"

"They—that is—Dick Evans is taking out the 2:13 ship for Seattle this afternoon instead of you . . . You see, Earl, this trip beyond the stratosphere will need an expert pilot and . . . well, I *did* happen to mention your name . . . and the Big Chief, that is . . ."

"Well, I'll be . . .!"

NOW just what could a fellow do?

Here was Bob Hart as enthusiastic as a schoolboy over his scheme. He was simply obsessed with this idea of his—of shooting off into uncharted space at the limits of the earth's atmosphere in a mad hunt for some missing rocket ships that he firmly believed were being detained by a certain unfathomable force. He had even succeeded in gaining a friendly ear from the high moguls of Stratosphere Transport. Bob was tingling with glee at the prospect of a vast adventure, and he wanted none but myself as his companion—in fact, had arranged it all for me, before I had anything but the faintest intimation as to what he was up to.

Now what could a fellow do? The spark of adventure, though burning only faintly in my make-up, was not totally extinct. I gladdened Bob's heart with the "Yes" for which he was waiting. We plunged feverishly into the details of preparation for this unprecedented journey.

No. 43 was a small sturdily constructed ship that had been employed for several months in experimental flights and in mapping new routes through the stratosphere. Small in

structure, but exceptionally fast, it was the ideal vessel for our trip.

Bob and his fellow workers of the rocket shops busied themselves with the necessary alterations in the interior of the ship, while I did what I could in checking the controls and seeing that the various devices were in proper working order. For this was no ordinary flight. I had piloted rocket ships on most of the difficult stratosphere routes radiating from our main terminal in New York, and I was reasonably expert in the duties involved. But this trip was to be one never attempted before by man, in any sort of vehicle. Yet, such was the vitalizing contagion of my friend's enthusiasm, that, before long, I was almost as rabidly fervent about this mad scheme as I had at first been coldly indifferent.

"Well, Earl, there she is," remarked Bob proudly late that evening. We were viewing the product of the toil of a score of men working all through the day on No. 43. "She's all set! Fuel enough to lift us 175 miles above the surface of the earth—space suits for both of us and one to spare—oxygen helmets and enough of the generating chemicals for two weeks' constant supply—a month's rations—individual radio packs—the ship's radio in perfect shape—tools and equipment to meet any emergency."

"All set . . . even to guns and ammunition, I see," I observed significantly.

"Can't venture out without something along that line too," was his grim rejoinder. "Never can tell what unexpected things we might encounter up there."

How strangely prophetic was this terse statement of Bob's, in the light of later development.

"**W**E'RE off!"

An ominous hissing of exhaust gases and No. 43, her nose pointing upward at an angle of almost 90 degrees, left the greased ways of the launching frame and pierced the air with ever-gaining velocity. The early morning sun peeped through the port window of our rocket.

We ascended slowly at first, in order to avoid excessive heating while passing through the denser strata of the air, then picked up speed as we emerged into the rarer atmosphere. Seated at the controls, I applied the normal technique of stratosphere flight in the first few minutes of our journey. When the altimeter told us that we were close to ten miles above the earth's surface, I departed from the usual procedure. Instead of leveling off, as I had done so often before, I put the nose of the ship up into a practically vertical climb. I looked grimly at Bob, hovering at my elbow. He returned a mute glance that was full of meaning. The rocket exhausts, to my ears, seemed to hiss a chorus of defiance to the world below. We were plunging upward into a region that only a few of the hardest souls had ever dared to penetrate. For a moment I was beset by fearful misgivings. I was almost ready to regret our foolhardy plunge into the comparative unknown. Yet there was Bob by my side, a steely glint of determination in his eye, the eager craving for adventure delineated in the firm setting of his mouth and jaw. My reprehensible wave of timidity vanished. My lot was cast with Bob to the bitter end.

"Gosh, Earl," breathed Bob in my ear, "I've never been up as high as this." He peered down through one of the windows at the hazy mass which represented *terra firma*.

"Twenty-two miles," I read off mechanically from the instrument panel. A fleeting glance at the chronometer on the left. "Just under thirteen minutes—I'll say that's some climbing, eh, Bob?"

My companion was engaged for the moment in scanning the darkening sky through the overhead window. "Nothing to see yet, is there?" he mused. "We've still a good piece to go before we reach . . . whatever we're going to reach."

With the exhaust tubes singing a merry tune behind us, we kept climbing nearly vertically. Our altitude increased at the rate of about two miles each minute. Of course even with the friction of the air practically eliminated, I could not hope to approach the 16 mile a minute speed which was my normal horizontal velocity in stratosphere piloting. We were lifting a considerable load, and our ascent was naturally slow.

Throughout the course of the flight, we were in constant contact by radio with the Stratosphere Transport field below, as well as with private and government radio stations both near and far. Bob's frequent messages about our progress into uncharted space—and they were tersely dramatic messages indeed—were probably being gobbled up by thousands of eager listeners, both official and otherwise, stationed down below.

As we left the denser atmosphere behind, things took on a different aspect in the world outside our space ship. A deepening twilight settled about us, although the sun was clearly visible through the side port.

"Of course you know," I offered by way of explanation, "that daylight is caused by the diffusion or scattering of the sun's rays by the gas particles of our atmosphere. And, since there

is no atmosphere up here—or very little—there can be no daylight—or very little."

Bob Hart nodded knowingly, as though to indicate that he was entirely acquainted with this phenomenon and its causes. Both of us could not help but be fascinated by the spectacle of a blazing sun set in a violet sky—a sky that had now begun to burst forth with large and small pinpoints of light as thousands of stars became visible overhead.

The instrument on the panel registered an outside temperature of 145° below zero Fahrenheit. Within the rocket ship it was comfortably warm, thanks to the double-walled construction of the vessel, as well as to our auxiliary heating apparatus that had been in operation since early in the flight.

There was very little in the way of conversation attempted. Each of us was busy with his own particular tasks in connection with the propulsion and maneuvering of the space flyer. Once Bob turned to me with a twinkle in his eye. "Scared?" he asked simply . . . "I mean, of what's ahead of us."

"Not on your life!" was my prompt retort. Whatever my skepticism might have been yesterday (was it really only yesterday? . . . why it seemed like ages ago! . . .)—whatever my hesitancy might have been then, I was honestly commencing to enjoy this mad escapade.

"And you?" . . . I queried in kind.

"Who, *me!* . . ." returned Bob with feeling. "Why, damitall! . . . I wouldn't want to be anywhere else, except right in No. 43, for all the money in the world!"

And I believe that he honestly meant it.

Forty-eight miles . . .

The sun sent its blazing rays through the *vitro-quartz* windows of the ship, the intense heat being evident even through this highly insulating material. It was apparent that the almost total absence of air about us removed that shielding effect that so thoroughly tempered the sun's heat down at the earth's surface. The patches of sky visible through the other windows were now no more than squares of dark velvet studded with jewels of surpassing brilliance.

Ninety-three miles . . .

"Nothing wrong up at this altitude—apparently," breathed Bob. "The earlier test rockets made this distance with ease—and reported back safely in every case."

We plunged relentlessly onward. The angle of our flight was still almost 90°. The vertical mileage clicked off steadily. The ominous tension increased. We were plunging furiously ever upward into the limitless emptiness of space. We might just as well be half-way to the moon for the appearance of things. And we know that we were fast entering that mysterious region of the missing rocket vehicles. At least, I knew that Bob was thinking of nothing else. And, as for me . . . why . . . dash it all! . . . I was prepared to admit that I had actually begun to accept the same scatterbrain notion that my giddy friend entertained. Yes . . . this was the area that held the nefarious secret of the six lost space vehicles. And it was up to us to solve the dark mystery. That was our mission . . .

Our plan of campaign was of necessity very sketchy. Since we had started forth with no conception of what we were going to encounter, we couldn't have prepared any very systematic scheme of action.

"We ought to level off soon," sug-

gested Bob—"let's stay at about 130 miles. We can scout around at this elevation for a spell—and then shoot up higher if necessary."

I fell in with the plan. Bob had been at the control levers operating the battery of searchlights that enabled the exploration of space in any desired direction. He bent to his task anew, his face pressed against the *vitro-quartz* window, eagerly scanning the emptiness outside.

"Well, here goes!" I remarked gaily. "One-hundred and thirty-three. I'll swing her down gradually and . . ."

A terrific jolt sent a quiver through the ship. A peculiar sound, half grinding, half sloshing, filled my ears—as though No. 43 were ripping through a mixture of gravel and soft cheese. The sharp impact flung me violently against the control panel. I held on grimly to the corner of the instrument board, while my feet steadied themselves automatically against the floor of the chamber. I was dazed no less by the suddenness of the whole thing than by its violence.

The collision, or whatever it was, had apparently put our illuminating system out of kilter, and only a single emergency bulb glowed feebly over the control board. I could see Bob curled up in a heap in the corner where the first jolt had precipitated him. He did not move.

With a half-cry in my throat, I stumbled blindly along the wall toward the spot where his grotesquely crumpled form lay. The going was precarious. Our ship was still lunging crazily, her speed apparently diminished little. Straining and creaking in every member and at every joint of her sturdily constructed body, No. 43 was ripping along toward seemingly inevitable destruction.

Hours seemed to have elapsed since the first shock, although it was a matter of only a few seconds. I had traversed about half of the distance to my unconscious companion. Suddenly the ship was flung sharply on her side. My uncertain grasp on whatever object I happened to be holding on to at the moment was entirely insufficient to save me from calamity. My fingers were torn violently from their grip and I felt myself being hurled bodily through space. For a fleeting instant I visioned a kaleidoscopic smear of lights and colors. Then my head struck something hard with a resounding smack. My senses abruptly departed.

MY first impression when I came to was the curious absence of motion and sound. I opened my eyes. The surroundings were familiar, although the angle of things was not quite the usual one. In my befuddled condition it took me an appreciable time to conclude that the rocket vessel must be lying on its side.

"Hello, old man!" came a cheery voice, and I first became aware of Bob Hart bending over me. A funny looking white cloth was about his head and cocked over one ear. I was about to laugh at his ludicrous aspect, and then I was minded to bring my hand to my own head, which had suddenly begun to make its presence vividly real by a sharp jab of pain. I touched the folds of a crudely arranged bandage across my forehead.

"By thunder! . . . What's happened?" I mumbled as I sat up and gazed around at the scene of confusion about the room.

"Hanged if I know," vouchsafed Bob simply. "We must have hit something big and solid—no question about that."

"A meteor?" I ventured.

"Maybe," Bob returned, "although I was watching pretty carefully at the moment we struck—and there was nothing in sight overhead—I'm absolutely certain about that!"

"You had your lights playing directly in our path?"

"All the time, and not a doggone thing in sight—and suddenly *plunk!*—we run right into it—and I get knocked cold."

"Yes, and then it was my turn to bump my head against something hard and unyielding."

"After which I come to and find you stretched out here like a flounder—and it took me the good part of an hour to bring you around."

"Thanks, old fellow, but," and I looked around anxiously, "the ship's not moving! . . . We've landed *somewhere!*"

"If that was a meteor we hit," suggested Bob, "then we must have turned right around and fallen all the way back to where we came from."

"What!" I interposed heatedly. "A hundred and thirty odd miles of free fall! . . . Don't be ridiculous, Bob. There wouldn't be enough left, either of us or of No. 43, to sweep up into a dustpan."

"Well, then, we must be on another planet," mused Bob, "or maybe a comet or some bit of flying matter that has trapped us and is carrying us out into space."

"Have you had a look outside?" I asked, at the same time reaching up painfully to get to the window over my head.

"Yes, and I can't make it out at all," was the puzzled reply.

Together we stood up and gazed out. The sky presented that same velvet black appearance, with millions of brighter and dimmer specks of

light sprinkled over its wide expanse. Our ship was half-over on its side, and resting on some kind of dark and totally unfamiliar surface. The landscape too was decidedly queer. We were lying on a slight rise of ground, which stretched down and away from us in a series of gentle depressions and elevations. A glance through the opposite windows revealed the same undulating surface receding from our position.

"This certainly isn't the earth," I ventured.

"And it can't be Mars, or the moon, or a star or something," added my friend.

The only way to solve the mystery, we soon agreed, was to step out and do some exploring. Very likely, we opined, this enigmatic incident was in some way tied up with the fate of the missing rocket ships.

We struggled into our space suits, albeit with considerable difficulty, because of the recently acquired aches and pains in various portions of our anatomy. Constructed of the newly developed *tungstone* fibre, these suits provided for their wearers a uniformly normal pressure on the surface of the body under all sorts of the extreme conditions obtaining without—whether it was the excessive pressures encountered in deep sea diving, or the complete absence of pressure found in a total vacuum. The crude swathing of bandages, that Bob had improvised for both of us, we discarded. What were a few assorted lacerations and contusions in the sudden thrill of our new adventure? And furthermore the cloth wrappings interfered seriously with our oxygen helmets—in fact, made it entirely impossible even to get them on. So the surgical paraphernalia went by the board. With our helmets in place, we took a mo-

ment or two to see that the compact radio converser in each was in perfect order.

"O. K., Earl," came Bob's cheery voice through the ear-pieces, after an exchange of messages. "All set to go!"

"Don't forget your gun," I remarked significantly, as I reached for my own and stowed it away in the pocket of my space suit.

The double air-lock of the rocket chamber gave us no little difficulty. The rough handling which our ship had undergone had jammed something in the mechanism, and it required considerable exertion to pry open the second of the two air-tight flaps. Finally we mastered the balky locks, and, stepping up and out of our semi-supine ship, we clambered down to solid ground.

No, it was not very solid, we soon found out. "Feels like sponge rubber, doesn't it?" commented Bob. My foot sank several inches into the soft surface and rebounded as I shifted my weight to the other foot.

"And say, Earl, isn't it beastly cold out here?" complained my friend. I nodded in agreement. The intense cold penetrated even the nearly perfect insulation of our *tungstone* suits. I glanced at the temperature recording instrument built like a wrist watch on the left sleeve of my space garment.

"No wonder," I remarked. "Look at what the thermometer has to say: 256° below zero Fahrenheit! And while we're at it, how about the pressure?" I consulted the instrument on my right wrist. "Zero millimeters of mercury—no air—an *absolute vacuum*!"

Our attention reverted to the curiously spongy ground. It appeared to be composed of flat slabs of material, varying widely in size and shape, and arranged in strata and overlap-

ping layers, like shingles on a roof. Some slabs were uniformly and evenly placed. Others were scattered about with no apparent system. In the immediate vicinity of our rocket ship the surface of the ground seemed to be more than ordinarily disturbed. The slab strata were buckled up in wrinkles of folds, as though showing the result of a great upheaval. Curiously enough, we observed, none of the individual sponge plates were dislodged from position. The corrugations of the ground were not of single slabs, but of whole layers of them. Truly, I could remember nothing on earth that resembled this queer construction.

From an examination of the puzzling nature of the ground beneath our feet, we turned to an exploration of what could be seen overhead. Bob uttered an exclamation and pointed aloft.

"I'll be darned, Earl! . . . Isn't that the moon?"

"Sure it's the moon, and nothing else!"

There was no denying it. That silvery satellite of ours was too familiar a sight to be mistaken for anything else. There she hung, low in the sky off to our left, her craters and mountains and valleys forming that combination of light and shadow that constituted the familiar face of the "Man in the Moon."

And then my eyes roamed over the expanse of jeweled sky above us. I was no adept at astronomy, but I had little trouble in identifying several familiar constellations. I called Bob's attention to them and he verified my observations.

We marveled at the curious combination of things which assailed our senses in this strange region into which we had been so unceremoniously dumped. Here was an unprece-

ented confusion of phenomena—some commonplace, some queer—some ordinary, some bizarre. Was this the earth? Was this some other planet or heavenly body in space? Where in thunder were we? . . .

BOB and I were in no position to determine our situation adequately. We had not yet seen enough of the place to form any definite conclusions. We must explore further. Perhaps we would soon come to an adequate explanation of our queer predicament.

Scrambling down the slope from the elevated point where the ship had come to rest, we continued our reconnoitering expedition. The going was very easy, what with the curiously springy nature of the ground as well as the seemingly diminished gravitational effect.

"I wonder," remarked my companion, "if we'll find any kind of living creatures out here in this God-forsaken country."

"I can't see how any form of life could possibly maintain itself here," I replied. "The conditions aren't exactly what you'd call ideal. However, let's be on the lookout."

It soon became apparent to us that there was nothing in the immediate vicinity of our ship to give us much information as to our whereabouts. We must extend our area of exploration. However, of necessity, we must not lose contact with the ship itself. Neither of us could venture even a guess as to the possible dangers that might befall us in this queer land of sponginess and semi-darkness. And good old No. 43, partly disabled though she was, represented our only link with the world from which we had come (wherever that might be right now).

We took careful note of the position of the ship with relation to certain of the more easily distinguishable landmarks. We also made some approximation at compass directions by observation of the stars. Wherever or whatever this land might turn out to be, at least we could safely plot our journeyings by the location of the well-known star groupings overhead. We were thankful for that fortunate circumstance.

The way to the west appeared to be mostly downhill and less ragged in its topography than any other. We therefore took that direction. The choice was a lucky one, as brought out by subsequent developments.

The way led down a gradual slope into a sort of ravine. This wound off to the northwest for a short distance, and then led out upon another stretch of flat land. Following that open area we crossed a slight ridge, then dipped once more into the gully that turned west again. Here and there we observed a stunted form of vegetation in the shape of a low scraggy bush, growing to a height of about a foot or less. Perhaps this was the only form of organic matter in this queer domain, for we could observe no evidence of insect or other animal life. And as for intelligent living beings . . .

About a half hour of tramping in a generally westerly direction added very little to our existing fund of information about this curious land.

"Let's go back to the ship," I suggested, "and start off on another track. Maybe we picked the worst direction at the very start."

Bob readily agreed that there was no point in following our present angle of attack any longer. We were about to retrace our steps, when Bob

seized me by the arm and pointed to the left of our position.

"See that haze?" he breathed.

I followed his gesture. A slight ridge ran east and west several hundred feet from our present location. The brow of this elevation was strangely lit up as by a pink halo. It appeared to denote some kind of illumination on the other side—not a steady illumination, but one that flickered mysteriously.

"I'd say it's a bonfire," suggested Bob.

"A bonfire! . . . in a vacuum? . . . nonsense!" . . . I returned.

"Let's see what it is," he ventured.

We made our way cautiously up the slight rise toward the crown. The pink glow seemed to grow stronger, and the flickering more pronounced. Crawling on our stomachs, we slowly approached the crest of the ridge. We attained the summit and peered anxiously over.

The sight that met our astonished eyes was one not easily erased from our memory.

In the centre of the wide depression lay the missing rocket ships . . .

Five of them were lying side by side on the ground, as though lined up for inspection. The sixth, which I immediately recognized from its size and general appearance as the latest of the vessels to have disappeared into space, lay by itself somewhat off to the side.

But the thing that nearly took our breath away was the bewildering maze of pink lights about the rocket projectiles. Small, glowing spots of pink light—and they twisted and squirmed and meandered all around and over the ships.

"Look!" breathed my companion tensely. "They're some kind of living things!"

Sure enough, when my eyes had become accustomed to the eery glow, I could make out dim shadowy forms that moved about. Apparently the glowing knobs of pink light were attached to these moving beings. And what grotesque beings

They were roughly cubical in shape, and about two feet in height, with innumerable hair-like projections or tentacles that extended out from the body in all directions. The organism was made of some semi-transparent material resembling gelatine, which quivered and flowed with every motion of the body. From the top surface of the cube there grew out two longer and thicker tentacles, each terminating in a rounded knob. And it was this knob that threw forth that ghostly glow.

There were hundreds—perhaps *thousands*—of these extraordinary beings, all of them moving about in feverish haste around and over the assembled rocket ships. It was very evident to us both, as we crouched apprehensively on the rim of the hollow, that they were engaged in some exceedingly hectic activity. As the cubical organism swarmed over the ships their translucent bodies quivered and their hair-like tentacles lashed and squirmed in a most uncanny fashion. But most marvelous of all to our bewildered eyes was the swaying and bobbing of the glowing bulbs at the extremities of the thicker appendages.

For the space of several minutes Bob and I watched this unearthly spectacle in speechless amazement. Then my companion broke the silence with a hoarsely whispered question.

"What do you make of it, Earl?"

"We've found the missing rockets all right, Bob—and plenty more too!"

"Those bugs—or whatever the

creatures may be—certainly are flocking all over the ships like a swarm of flies around an overturned jug of molasses."

"By George! do you see what I see?" why those rockets *they're half dismantled!*"

"Gosh, Earl, you're right! those blooming bugs have nearly picked the ships apart. Let's move up closer and get a better look."

We crawled a few feet nearer to the extraordinary scene of activity, and confirmed this startling observation. The five projectiles lying in the group together were literally mere shells of their former selves. Various surface plates had been removed, to reveal the vitals of the rocket mechanisms. Parts of the machinery could be seen lying about on the ground. Firing chambers, expulsion tubes, portions of the balancing fins, extra fuel containers it was evident that the rocket ships had been pretty thoroughly dissected.

"And they're still at it! those bugs!" I breathed into my mouthpiece.

The swarming jelly-cubes were engaged in the task of tearing the space vessels apart—yet there was methodicalness and system about the entire uncanny procedure. This was no mere act of vandalism or wanton destruction.

THESE beings were occupied in a careful and exhaustive study of the captured vessels—for that was really what the rocket ships were. As we watched the doings below in open-mouthed and open-eyed astonishment, we could see a half-dozen organisms manipulating a hinged panel from one of the air-locks. Bulky and heavy though it was, they lifted it from its fastenings with ease, and bore it over

the side of the vessel. Gently they deposited it on the ground alongside of several more panels that had doubtlessly been removed from the other ships with equal facility and despatch. Following this operation, the beings hastened back to proceed with the task of dismemberment. Similar scenes were taking place over the entire area of activity. The whole performance reminded me strongly of the bustle and haste that is observed about a good-sized ant hill.

"Look at how they lift things!" whispered Bob. "They use those funny-looking horns with the pink headlights."

It was obvious that these cubical beings possessed enormous physical power which was concentrated in the knob-like antennae. There was no clutching or holding the heavy parts of the rocket ships as each portion was removed. Instead the creatures applied the glowing bulbs to the surface of the object and then lifted the mass as though it were weightless.

And not only were these magical appendages employed for lifting and carrying. My companion called my attention to a spot off to the side where one of the rocket tool kits had been deposited. There a group of cube beings were tackling the metal box, the cover of which had become jammed, probably as a result of the impact landing. Evidently failing to disengage the locking mechanism, they were attacking the cover with their shining knobs. Several held the box while one being ran the glowing tips of his antennae appendages along the edge of the cover. Two faintly luminous streaks appeared in the wake of the moving bulbs. The metal seemed to be sheared as though by an oxy-acetylene torch of needle-like thinness. In a few moments the

recalcitrant cover was completely severed, and fell away at the mere touch from the all-powerful knob of another of the cube beings.

More startling, almost, than anything else was the disintegrating power of these appendages. In slicing through the solid matter of the rocket structure the mysterious ray or other emanation from the luminous knob simply reduced the substance attacked into nothingness. The stuff was just melted away as if by a powerful flame. The effect was truly supernatural.

"They've got power in those headlight horns!" commented Bob in an awed whisper.

"They could do almost anything with them," I agreed.

"Anything!" echoed my companion. "Look over there, Earl. Do you see that group standing off to the side as though watching the show? And there are other clusters of idlers all about. You can see them bunched together waving their extension lights at each other and at the rest of the fellows who are working on the rocket ships. Those pink knobs must also be some kind of device for communication. Either they are transmitting messages and orders to the ones that are doing the dismantling job, or else they are carrying on a sort of conversation with each other."

There was no denying that Bob's observation and conclusion were very plausible indeed. From the agitated antennae-waving of the cube creatures standing at the side lines, so to speak, it was easily discernible that the appendages were also capable of transmitting intelligent thought from being to being.

I do not know how long we lay there and watched this unearthly spectacle. Minutes slipped by—per-

haps hours. The fascination of the phenomenon before us made time stand still.

Presently a change became apparent. The group of creatures nearest to our hiding place stopped the mysterious waving and tossing of glowing pink knobs. The squads of workers engaged in dismembering the ships halted in their tasks. The more distant clusters of cubes gradually abated their frenzied activity. As if by magic the agitation ceased. A death-like calm engulfed the little valley. Only here and there a single luminous knob waved almost imperceptibly—here and there a feeble pink glow blazed forth with exaggerated brilliance, then died down to faint luminosity once more.

Bob Hart and I exchanged glances of astonishment. What in thunder was the meaning of this abrupt paralysis down there? We peered into the valley again . . .

Suddenly another change became evident. The group nearest to us—the one that had been first to cease its activities—began to show signs of returning life. Again appendages waved and pink bulbs glowed. But there was an ominous something about the new activity. There was more agitation, more excitement, more suppressed tension apparent.

"Good Lord!" muttered Bob. "Could it be . . . ? Maybe they've discovered our presence, Earl! . . . Maybe . . . !"

The workers on the captive space ships had not resumed their tasks. Instead there was a gradual flow of cube beings over the sides of the recumbent vessels. They waddled and squirmed over mechanical parts and the assorted rocket equipment strewn about the scene. They were converging upon the cluster of their fellow creatures

that had started the sudden shift of activity. Off to the left and right other groups of beings were beginning to stir. All were moving toward one spot—the place directly below our point of concealment.

Could those enigmatic creatures, with their mysterious powers of divination, have become aware of our presence. So far I had not thought of associating fear or danger with these beings. But now a sudden wave of apprehension engulfed us. Were they hostile? . . . Were they harmless? . . . should we reveal ourselves? . . . should we take to our heels? . . .

"Looks like they *are* wise to us," I whispered. "They're holding some kind of council of war."

"And look at that fellow over there," replied Bob, "—the one with the reddish-pink headlight! . . . He seems to be doing all the talking, judging from the way he swings those bulbs around."

"We'd better be ready to move," I breathed. "If those bugs start coming for us our best bet is to show them our heels. No telling how they'd feel toward us."

"Right!" vouchsafed my friend, grimly. "It's back to No. 43 for us the minute those babies show any real sign that they're on to us."

For a few tense minutes the swarms of creatures in the valley contented themselves with hobnobbing and powwowing as though discussing a plan of action. All work on the six space-vessels was now at a standstill. The vigorous waving of antennae and the swaying and gliding of pink bulbs denoted the equivalent of a heated discussion. Then . . .

"Here they come! They've spotted us, Earl! . . . *Let's go!*"

As the horde of jelly-cubes came

swarming up the incline we leaped to our feet and made off in the direction from which we had so recently come. At least it was the general direction in which we thought our rocket ship lay. A fervent prayer was in my heart—that we do not go astray and miss No. 43—and I was positive that my panting friend at my side entertained the same earnest hope.

A glance behind showed that in running prowess we were more than a match for our cubical pursuers. The uncanny sponginess of the surface under our feet and the apparent diminution of gravitational force served to make our progress one succession of enormous leaps and bounds.

But even if we *were* to succeed in reaching the shelter of our rocket ship, would we be safe there? Through my mind, as I ran, there flashed the scene of the disemboweled projectiles behind us, with the flocks of cubical beings tearing and cutting the rocket shells as though they were made of cardboard. But why cross bridges

A FEW minutes of running so widened the lead we had taken over our pursuers that they were visible as merely a pink glow in the rear. We stopped to take our bearings. Were we heading the right way? There was no telling how much actual distance we had put between ourselves and No. 43 in our trip of exploration. In the dim starlight it was impossible to see very far in any direction.

"We'll just have to trust to luck," I panted. "If we miss the ship, then"

By this time the pursuing mob of creatures had shortened by half the distance between us. The first of the swarm were just emerging over a low ridge behind us, their glowing ap-

pendages waving briskly. The ominous pink haze beyond the vanguard indicated that the rest were not far to the rear.

Once more we were off, scrambling down into a gully and up the other side in the general direction where we thought our ship lay. A few minutes of prodigious running—which was nothing more than a glorified "hop-skip-and-jump" game—brought us well ahead of the cube creatures once more.

And then

We emerged from a broad shallow valley and up a gentle slope and there was our rocket ship, half over on its side, just as we had left her, I don't know how many hours ago. *Good old 43* no sight could have been more welcome at this precise moment.

Bob and I galloped up the spongy slope and tackled the air-lock panel. Involuntarily a groan escaped my lips. The infernal lock! The mechanism had become jammed in some manner, and could not be budged. I recalled that this self-same device had given us no little trouble on the occasion of our quitting the ship some time ago. And now, at this critical stage, the balky locking gadget refused to operate.

We tugged manfully and swore softly. Confound it! On our way out the blamed lock had worked—after a while—and after a fashion. Certainly, it couldn't go back on us now!

I relinquished my grip on the door handle, and shot a glance over my shoulder. Just as I thought! The vanguard of the cube creatures was in sight. Pink bulbs glowing fiercely, antennae beating about furiously, gelatinous masses waddling grotesquely as they rushed upon us.

In the eery half-light from the star-speckled dome of the heavens, this advancing horde presented a terrifying spectacle indeed.

With a cry, I whipped out my automatic from its sheath in my space suit and let fly at the wobbling masses that swept toward us. I pumped away as fast as my finger could work the trigger. And now my weapon was empty . . . and still they came on relentlessly. Good God! . . . were these hideous creatures immune to flying lead? Apparently so. Surely I had made some direct hits in that thickly crowded mass of cubical bodies. Yet there was no more impression made than if I had been pelting them with peas. Only the most imperceptible wavering of the ranks, and then they were on their way again toward us with the grim relentlessness of an onrushing flood.

I was momentarily paralyzed by the fearsome sight. Then a sharp cry of exultation from Bob broke the spell. I wheeled swiftly. During my ineffectual bombardment he had continued his struggle with the obstinate mechanism. And now he had the door open. In a twinkling he had me by the arm and flung me bodily into the narrow inner compartment of the air lock. Scrambling in behind me he slammed the door shut again, just as the first of the pursuing creatures hurled themselves upon the ship.

The second hatch leading into the control chamber of the vessel gave us but little difficulty. We tumbled through the opening and lay panting on the floor. We could do no more for the space of several moments.

"Whew! . . . that was a narrow squeak!" gasped Bob. I had not yet caught my breath, so the best I could do was nod weakly in reply.

"What do you say if we get rid

of this truck we're carting around," continued my chum. He suited action to words by flinging off his helmet and struggling out of his space suit. I did likewise, and presently we stood facing each other, smiling, hands gripped, as though greeting one another after a long separation.

"And now about our little friends outside," I remarked. We could plainly detect a soft scraping sound on the outer surface of the ship, above our heads and on all sides,

"That's them!" said Bob, tersely, if ungrammatically. "They're climbing all over us . . . Look Earl . . . there at that window!"

I followed his glance. One of the creatures was pressed close to the transparent surface. More joined him. Soon a whole group of them was clustered there. I looked about in dismay. The other windows were now similarly decorated. The cube beings were crowding each other at every port, their glowing blubs waving briskly at us.

We prepared to resist the onslaught—although I was frank to admit to myself that the means at our command for such resistance were pitifully weak. What about that stream of bullets I had sent in their direction only a few minutes ago? . . .

"Shall we try a getaway?" asked my companion. "We can shake this whole crowd in a jiffy by giving her the gun."

"But where to?" I queried. "We don't know where we are. We may be worse off somewhere else—if we ever manage to get there. How do we know that the bump of landing here didn't put our driving mechanism out of commission? Better let's hang on here, and see what turns up. So far those fellows haven't started to do us any harm."

"You're right, old man," returned Bob seriously. "If they meant to injure us they would have started their dirty job by now."

"And they certainly could make short work of this old crate, if they wanted to," I added. "You saw how those other ships looked over in that valley, didn't you? Well, what's preventing them from making mincemeat out of No 43 in three shakes of a pink headlight?"

"And speaking of headlights," said Bob, "just look at the way they're waving those bulbs at the windows. Darned if I don't think they're trying to communicate a message to us—and darned if I could make out what it is they're trying to say."

I soon agreed with my friend that the queer creatures were very evidently not hostile, and that their persistent antennae-waving denoted some attempt on their part to communicate with us. The groups of beings remained crowded at the various windows for many minutes, and they kept up the constant swaying of illuminated appendages. The pattering and scraping on the surface of the ship could still be heard. Presently that sound ceased. Soon the groups began to thin out at the windows. One by one they left their posts and slid out of sight. And now they were all gone—each transparent panel revealed only a patch of star-sprinkled sky.

Bob and I looked at each other with apprehension, and edged cautiously to the nearest port. We peered out. The cube men had retreated to a distance of several hundred yards and were massed together there as though holding a council of war. A hasty glance through the other windows revealed that they were congregated in a wide circle about the ship.

WE came back to our original observation post and anxiously watched the developments without. Apparently all was quiet on the cubical front. The army of creatures maintained their position with no further moves, either hostile or otherwise. We did observe at length that the ranks of our besiegers were beginning to thin out. In small groups they were departing from the scene of activity. We could see clusters of pink lights moving down the slope stretching away from our position, and disappearing over the edge of the distant ridge. Were they giving up the siege? Were they abandoning their attempt to get us out of our stronghold? Were they cooking up some new campaign, some new strategy? We had no way of knowing. All we could do was guess—and, under the circumstances, I was ready to confess that we were miserably poor guessers.

Minutes dragged along with no sign of any new move on the part of the cubical beings surrounding our ship. The remaining cluster of native creatures kept their distance from us and did nothing. Bob and I relaxed our extreme tension. My comrade dropped on one of the cots, while I sank into a chair nearby. We fell to discussing our queer predicament.

We went over all the incidents of our trip from the moment we left the earth. Everything appeared to have gone normally at the start. Up to an altitude of one hundred and thirty odd miles our progress had been uneventful. Our minds were vividly clear about each succeeding step up to that point.

"And then *kerplunk!*" said Bob, ". . . . we run right into *this!*" with a sweep of his hand to-

ward one of the windows.

From the moment of the terrific impact that had knocked us both senseless, our thoughts and sensations were one dizzy confusion. The spongy ground—the absence of atmosphere—the familiar celestial manifestations of moon, stars and constellations. Then the lost rocket ships—the gelatinous cube men with their luminous appendages—the mad chase back to our vessel—our present imprisonment, for, whichever way we regarded the matter, we were virtual prisoners.

"But the missing rocket ships," repeated Bob "we found them after all. At least that part of the mystery is cleared up, even though the rest of it is still one grand puzzle."

More discussion and comment back and forth, without reaching any satisfactory explanation of our present plight.

"There's one thing we haven't done yet," I suggested. "When we first tumbled into the ship after that wild chase, you mentioned a possible getaway. I didn't think much of the idea then. But it strikes me that we ought to look into it now. Not exactly for a getaway, mind you. But if we could get the ship off the ground we could do some exploring around these parts. And we could do it safely—comparatively speaking."

Bob readily fell in with my idea. An examination of our fuel supply revealed that we had on hand slightly less than half the quantity with which we had started the trip. When we came to the driving mechanism, however, we met a situation which each of us in his heart had dreaded, although each of us had, up to this point, been unwilling to put his fears into words. The shock of our precipitous landing in this strange region

had seriously damaged our rocket apparatus. We carefully tested each firing chamber and each exhaust tube in turn. Three of the propulsive units behaved beautifully. The other twelve were either lifeless or else hopelessly erratic in their operation. A heart-breaking performance.

Bob went over the mechanism carefully. After some extensive tinkering he was willing to confess that the damage to the balky units was more considerable than could be corrected with the tools and spare parts at present on hand. We eyed each other with dismay.

"We're stuck!" grunted my companion as he threw down a wrench and wiped the beads of perspiration from his brow with the back of his oil-stained glove. "Can't even *think* of budging her on only three units—and I don't know how we'll ever get the others repaired. Unless!" and his face suddenly brightened as a happy thought seemed to flash into his mind.

"Unless what?" I queried sharply.

"Those six prisoner ships over yonder!" he replied tensely. "By George, there are enough parts in those hulks to patch us up in great shape, and to spare. And then there's the fuel! must be plenty left in the tanks. If only we could get over there and lay our hands on the stuff!"

His voice trailed away into dismal silence. I could see the hopelessness of his wish. Here we were cooped up in our tiny shell like rats in a trap and encircled by that band of jelly-like creatures. The six vessels with their plentiful reserve of precious fuel and that assortment of replacement parts for our damaged machinery might just as well be back on earth or up there on the moon, for all the good we could get out of them.

Our present thoughts as well as tasks were abruptly terminated by a renewed activity on the part of the cube men. In our preoccupation with the job of examining and testing, we had forgotten them for the time being. And now they were brought back to our attention by a renewal of the familiar scraping and thumping on the outer surface of the ship. At the same time we could see groups of them clustering at the windows again, crowding each other at every one of the panels.

Instinctively we reached for our automatics. This meant an attack, and nothing else—although we realized fully how puny was our defense against these creatures.

"They must have been aroused by our test shots through the rocket tubes," breathed Bob apprehensively. "Maybe they have an idea we're getting ready to start action against them."

Fearfully we waited in the centre of the chamber, our eyes skipping from one window to another. Each had its quota of squirming, jostling masses, tentacles weaving and swaying, luminous bulbs glowing weirdly in ever-changing patterns.

Tense minutes passed, with no evidence of the impending attack. Taut nerves slackened. Apprehension dissolved. Frankly, I was beginning to become accustomed to the freaky behavior of these enigmatic organisms.

"I'll be darned, Earl!" My chum broke the silence precipitously. "Did it ever occur to you that we're just afraid of a *bogey-man*? We seem to have the idea that these creatures are out for our skins. But so far, have they really harmed us any? All they've done is chase us back into the ship. And if they really had any intentions of injuring us, what's stop-

ping them from slicing up No. 43 in the same way that we saw them operating on the other space flyers. That would be the easiest way for them to get at us, wouldn't it Earl? And yet, they are satisfied with standing off at a distance, or crowding around at the windows the way you see them right now."

"Well, Bob, what do you think we ought to do?"

"Do? . . . Well, I'll tell you. I've got half a notion that the bet for us would be to go right outside and talk turkey to those bugs."

"Talk? . . . What do you mean by 'talk'?"

"Just what I said . . . talk! . . . Why, can't you see, Earl . . . those beings are really trying to communicate with us. Just look at them. That peculiar motion of their headlights is probably the only way they have of conversing with each other. And all they're trying to do, no doubt, is to talk to us in the only language they are capable of using. Now isn't that a reasonable assumption?"

I was inclined to agree with my keenly observant companion. What short sighted idiots we had been—to attribute hostile designs to these apparently peaceable denizens of this extraordinary region.

And so we hastily donned our space-suits once more and sallied forth through the still balky air-lock into the vacuum without. As we emerged, the last of the cube men were just scrambling down from their perch at the rocket ship windows. We stepped out upon the spongy slabs, advanced a few paces, and halted. The creatures remained stationed in a compact semicircle. The only motion was that ubiquitous swinging of pink bulbs.

"Darned if I know how to begin!" Bob's voice sounded faintly in my helmet ear pieces.

"Let's try waving to them," I ventured back.

WE must have cut an extremely ludicrous appearance, standing there in our bulky space suits, waving our arms in a manner resembling an old-fashioned Boy Scout novice going through a semaphore drill. But it appeared to elicit the desired result. When we commenced our manual oscillations, the motion of the luminous appendages ceased. After a few minutes of energetic signaling on our part, the others resumed their swaying. It was comical—our waving at them, their waving back at us, neither knowing what the other was trying to say.

At any rate we established one thing—the cubical beings were definitely not hostile, and were evidently trying to transmit intelligent thought to us. That was something to be thankful for. We breathed more freely

Still maintaining their signaling motions, they closed in about us with an air about them of disarming friendliness. They came almost to within arm's length of us, and we were better able to observe and study their outlandish structure.

Each cubical being was semitransparent, as we had noted before. The gelatinous mass was not uniform in texture, but presented a bewildering conglomeration of large and small patches or globules of darker and lighter hue.

There was nothing stationary about these patches. They quivered and vibrated as though suspended in semi-solid gelatine. But more uncanny still

was the fact that most of the areas were colored. The larger ones particularly bore characteristic hues that gave the individual a distinctive chromatic *motif*. Looking about I was surprised to see that no two cubes boasted the same identical pattern. However nearly alike any pair of individuals might be, there was still an elusive something about their color scheme that seemed to distinguish one from the other without possibility of error. And there were hundreds of them crowded about us,—all different. The effect was truly kaleidoscopic.

Presently the encircling mass of cubes opened up before us, offering a cleared path down the slope. The direction was the same one which we had taken on our recent trip of exploration. The nearest of the assembled creatures waved his tentacles at us, then indicated the passageway lying ahead. Their request was self-evident. Bob and I exchanged questioning glances.

"It looks like they want us to march," I said.

"Well, no harm I guess," he replied. "Let's go!"

We trudged gallantly down the cleared passageway. The cube creatures waved approvingly—at least it was easy to read satisfaction in their movements and their demeanor. They closed in behind us and waddled along as an escort—a huge mob of strangely shaped, strangely colored and strangely lighted beings forming a seeming guard of honor for us in our march through this strange region.

Bob and I exchanged but few remarks and those only perfunctory in nature. We were both beginning to enjoy the novel predicament. With the thought of physical danger removed from our minds, at least for the

present, this escapade was developing into a real lark.

Soon I began to recognize familiar landmarks. We were nearing the spot where the lost space-ships were being dissected. And in a very few moments we again came upon the scene. It was still one of concerted activity. Swarms of cube men were busily engaged in the same dismembering task that we had been observing from our hiding place only a short time ago. Either a large number of our former pursuers had returned to their tasks during the period that Bob and I had been under siege in our ship, or else their places had been taken by others when the mass of workers had abandoned their jobs to give chase.

We were now motioned to draw closer. Signals flashed between the leaders of our escorting party and the overseers of the dismantling work. Tentacles waved and pink bulbs glowed. Some of the waving and flashing we surmised to be an exchange of messages among the cube men themselves. Part of it seemed to be directed right at us. As if subjected to an intangible urge, Bob and I descended into the work area among the dismantled rocket ships.

"There's only one way I can figure it out," my friend said. "These creatures are just plain curious about us and our means of travel—as curious as we are of them and their queer country. They are burning to know where we come from, how we got here; what makes these space-flyers operate. They've pretty well dismantled the ships in their efforts to get at the bottom of matters. And now that they've stumbled across us, they want to be shown how the whole thing came about. Now isn't that just the way you and I would react if the circumstances were reversed? Even

though these organisms are far from human, they display evidence of almost human mental processes."

Again I was compelled to admit that Bob had analyzed the situation with rare level-headedness. What explanation could be more in keeping with the facts as we had observed them thus far?

"Well," I replied, "let's see what we can show them. Maybe we can make something work in that conglomeration of assorted hardware down-below. Come on."

"And, while we're at it," continued Bob as we stumbled across the littered area, "now's our chance to see what we could locate in the way of spare parts to repair No. 48. Remember, Earl, we've somehow got to make that old tin can percolate. We're depending on her to bring us back to earth safely some day somehow !"

The assembled creatures followed our movements with rapt attention. At our approach all work on the six ships ceased. The crowd made way for us readily. The individual cubical beings almost tumbled over each other to get out of our path so that we could work without any interruption. The utmost respect and deference were displayed—it nearly amounted to downright awe.

Bob made a hasty inspection of the nearest ship. Most of the vitals had been removed and laid out on the ground close by. "All the mechanism is here," he grunted, after a cursory check-up, "and most of it's in fair condition, but it would take hours to reassemble the works."

We went on to the second flyer. The cube men closed in around us eagerly. I could almost feel the aura of curiosity and expectancy that pervaded

the very space all about us. The sensation was decidedly creepy.

"This looks better," said Bob laconically. Most of the parts are still intact. Let's see if we can't patch it up a little—just enough so we can give 'em a little demonstration."

The task was not an easy one, but we soon found that there was an abundance of eager assistance available on a moment's notice. In fact there was a super-abundance of it. The instant Bob beckoned for help in lifting one of the heavy exhaust nozzles there was a flood of gelatinous beings that all but swamped us. We actually had to shoo them off so that they would not be in our way. It was simply miraculous. Just as deftly as the ships had been dismantled, so deftly were the parts restored in the flyer upon which Bob and I were concentrating.

"I don't know if we can put it all together good as new," remarked Bob as the job progressed rapidly. "Some of the works are pretty well shot to pieces—either by the force of the landing, or else by the dismembering job to which the ship was subjected after she got here. Although," he added contemplatively, "from what we've seen of their work; these cube mechanics have shown remarkable care and even skill in tearing her apart. Well, all we can hope to do is to patch up one or two of the rockets units, and give them a sort of static demonstration."

As the work went on, I soon became aware of something noteworthy. Among the large flock of willing helpers that persisted in tumbling all over us and each other in their eager endeavor to lend their aid, I observed two that displayed even more eagerness than the rest. These two crea-

tures were always at our elbows—lifting, cutting, prying, hauling. I soon called Bob's attention to them. He had already become cognizant of the situation himself.

"Just look at them, will you!" I observed. "They're simply *dying* to be of help. Now take that one with the pea-green spots all through his body. He's been slaving like an automatic machine at this job, and doesn't seem to get tired."

"No more peppy than his friend over there, with the bright red polka dots," replied Bob. "By George," he added, "*Green* and *Red* are doing more work between them than any given dozen of their countrymen—and goodness knows the rest of them are no slouches by any means."

And so *Green* and *Red* they were forthwith christened. A couple of energetic fellows they proved to be and also endowed with phenomenal strength and stamina. They just clung to us like a couple of faithful hounds, always there to lend a hand—or rather a tentacle—in making a task lighter. And they demonstrated a phenomenal brand of intelligence. They seemed to read our thoughts and anticipate every one of our needs. A remarkable pair

Well, the job was finally finished—after a fashion. Bob succeeded in patching together two rocket units. We found a fairly considerable amount of spare fuel in the various tanks of the six ships—a fortunate circumstance we agreed between ourselves, for we could make use of it all in our not-so-distant endeavor to get back to earth.

"We'll have to go easy with this stuff," Bob said earnestly. "Can't go wasting too much of it on spectacular stunts like this one."

WE now waved the multitude of cubes back to a respectable distance, where most of them congregated in obviously eager anticipation of a dramatic demonstration. A few of the leaders stood close by to watch our manipulations. *Green* and *Red* were among this group. Bob adjusted the trigger mechanism for remote control firing, and then we stood back. Frankly we did not expect anything very startling—and we were not disappointed. The two rocket chambers began firing nearly simultaneously, and continued to discharge for nearly a minute. Bluish-white flames spurted from the exhaust nozzles, scorching the ground for a distance of several feet. The ship, lying there on its side, responded only feebly to the driving impulse. She bucked and quivered for the duration of the firing period, then settled back serenely.

The demonstration was over almost in less time than it takes to tell it, yet it made a remarkable impression on the assembled spectators. The creatures had been tensely motionless during the few moments of the actual test. Now they commenced their everlasting tentacle-waving once more, only it was more vigorous and more meaningful than before. This was evidently their form of applause and approval. They crowded about us, with *Green* and *Red* always among the nearest to us. The cube men were pleased. The demonstration had, to them, been a huge success, and they were letting us know that they had liked it immensely.

I recalled that this was really the second demonstration we had given these people. The first one had been on the occasion only a short time ago, when we had tested out the rocket discharges while besieged in our own vessel. I remembered that the cube

men had withdrawn to a distance at the time, and the start of our firing tests was the signal which brought the creatures flocking back to our windows in bewilderment and surprise. Only this present spectacle was more in the nature of a planned presentation. And the creatures accepted it as a phenomenal accomplishment. At least that much was evident from their signals of approval and encouragement.

We honestly did not know what we had succeeded in demonstrating to the queer inhabitants of this region, but we were certain of one thing, and we did not hesitate to assure ourselves of it and rejoice over it together, even in the confusion that surrounded us for the moment. We had proved to our own satisfaction that there were materials and means available here to make all necessary repairs on our own ship—when the time came—and make her fit to start back with us to civilization—also when the time came.

But now our chief object was to take advantage of the situation in which we found ourselves at present. Undoubtedly we had gained the respect and admiration of the cubical natives. Our slightest wish was their holy command. It behooved us to capitalize on our unexpected advantages.

While we were receiving the luminous plaudits of the assembled cubical multitude the sun rose. The phenomenon was of course nothing like a terrestrial sunrise. The flaming orb appeared suddenly above the eastern edge of the valley and shot steadily upward into the indigo sky. The myriads of stars remained unchanged in the dark dome of the heavens, adding their feeble illumination to the eerie yellow glow cast over the scene by the rising sun.

The rocket demonstration being

over, the cube men appeared to be highly pleased. They now closed in upon us from three sides leaving a cleared passageway for us. By their gesticulations they endeavored to convey an invitation. Clearly, they wanted to escort us somewhere else. Again we trudged along dutifully across spongy plains and over hills and through valleys of resilient rubber-like substance. Somehow we could not feel any apprehension. There was something about the naive, almost childlike simplicity of these creatures, that was totally disarming. Bob and I conversed in whispers as we tramped along in this curious convoy of waddling jelly cubes and bobbing globes of light. We agreed that it was the grandest lark ever given humans to experience. We were determined to see it through at all cost

"Say, Earl," remarked Bob presently. "Do you feel as warm as I do?"

"Do I?" was my retort. "It's just sweltering here inside this suit of mine!"

The sun had been advancing steadily as we marched, and was now beating down upon us with relentless fury. It was only then I realized that the absence of any detectable atmosphere in this region was the primary cause of our discomfort. On earth the blanket of air acted as an incubator against the sharp intensity of the sun's rays. Furthermore the motion of the air in the form of winds also made for an equalization of temperature between places that were exposed to the direct glare from the sun and places that were sheltered. But here we had no such tempering influences. The rays of heat beat down mercilessly upon us.

"These outfits we're wearing aren't an awful lot of protection," grumbled Bob. His face visible through his hel-

met visor was flushed. Beads of perspiration stood out on his forehead.

"Not much," I agreed glumly. I extended my arm bearing the wristlet thermometer. "There, look 230° F and that's the very limit of this instrument. Lord knows how much hotter it really is. That *tungstone* space suit you're wearing is not quite as good a protection against excessive heat as it is against excessive cold. But can you imagine where you and I would be without them?"

"Our little friends here don't seem to mind it at all." Bob looked about enviously at the escorting throng of creatures waddling along beside us and behind us. "Gosh, Earl, they don't seem to require protection from the sun's heat more than from the intense cold of night."

True enough, the cubical organisms appeared to be totally oblivious to the withering heat from above. They marched along blithely, chatting briskly with each other after their own peculiar fashion, waving their luminous bulbs cheerfully at us, trying to make us believe that they were enjoying themselves immensely.

Well, we finally came to a level plain that was set out in some kind of geometric pattern. Long straight ridges crossed and crisscrossed in accurate squares and rectangles. The ridges were mere lines of raised ground material only a few inches in height. Low, oddly-shaped forms, also in severe geometric design and made of the same building substance, stood out here and there in the marked areas. These too were barely a foot in height. Throughout the plain there swarmed the cubical creatures, some moving from square to square, some clustered motionless along the ridges and about the raised geometric masses.

"This must be their city," I ventured.

"Well, it's the queerest city I've ever seen," observed Bob. "Where are the buildings, or streets, or anything else that you'd find in a centre of habitation?"

"Maybe they're underground," was my guess. But no, there were no traces of any openings in the ground, or any evidences that would indicate the existence of sub-surface dwellings. We wandered around among the squares and hexagons, stepping over ridges and traveling along what appeared to be streets and avenues.

And the natives were everywhere—a continuous streaming and eddying of gelatinous cubes in a geometric world. Our original escort from the rocket area had apparently melted into the general throngs. Evidently we had been granted the freedom of the "City". As we wandered about the place the creatures made way for us deferentially. They seemed to want to make us feel perfectly at home. One thing I soon observed. All through our roamings I could perceive that *Green* and *Red* were near us always. I called my friend's attention to them. He had already become aware of the fact himself.

"Those two fellows certainly have become terribly attached to us," I said.

"Either that or else they've been detailed to keep an eye on us."

"That isn't very likely, Bob. They're acting more like a police escort to make our progress easier, than like a prison guard."

"Maybe so. They surely were a great help in that rocket demonstration back there."

"And now they're trying their best to see that our progress around these parts is smooth and unhampered.

That's the simplest explanation of their being around us all of the time, isn't it?"

"Guess you're right, Earl! But . . . confound this heat! . . . It's getting worse and worse! Can't we find some shelter around here?"

THERE was nothing even remotely resembling shade anywhere in this vast valley. The low squares and oblongs of ground material that dotted the area were pitifully inadequate. They cast a series of thin shadows along their edges just about sufficient to afford shade to a small animal like a cat, provided the said cat was judicious enough to hug the side of the structure closely. The vegetation scattered about the valley was of the same stubby type we had seen elsewhere in this region—no more than a foot in height and woefully insufficient to protect us from the sizzling rays of the sun.

"I don't relish the idea of being roasted alive," observed Bob dryly. "No use. . . we'll have to find some kind of protection. . . even if we've got to build it ourselves. . . !"

He stopped short.

"Well, if that isn't an idea," he exclaimed. His flushed face beamed gleefully through his helmet window.

We were now off near the edge of the valley, and some distance away from the throngs and congestion that we had encountered in the centre of the city. Only a few of the natives were circulating about in our immediate vicinity. Even our trusty body-guard, *Green* and *Red*, (if *body-guard* we could call them) were for the moment busying themselves with some other occupation several hundred feet from our present position.

"What's your idea?" I queried!

"Why can't we rig up some tempo-

rary shed or something?" Bob replied eagerly. "Look!" He kicked the ground with the toe of his boot and dislodged one of the rubbery slabs of which the surface was composed. "Just the thing! We can stand some of those slices up on their edges, and then build a kind of shed. Gee, they come away easily! And light? Why they weigh hardly anything!"

Bob had stooped and pried up one of the flat plates of ground material. It was roughly square in shape, measuring about three feet on a side, and was nearly five inches thick. He balanced it on its edge, and then, seizing it with both hands, he raised the slab high over his head so as to form a roof.

"There! that's what we need! A"

The words suddenly died in his throat. A gasp of astonishment came feebly through my earphones. I looked at him fearfully. There he stood, feet spread far apart, arms stretched up and out, clutching the edges of the thick slice of ground material that formed a canopy above him. His head was thrown back, and his eyes were riveted on the substance.

"Well I'll be a!"

The exclamation was sliced short, and a low, drawn-out whistle of utter amazement came to my ears. Bob lowered the slab slowly until it rested edgewise on the ground. He peered at it intently first from one side, then from the other. Once more an exclamation of astonishment escaped his lips. He raised the square plate aloft again, standing like a statue as before.

"For heaven's sake, what is it?" I queried sharply.

"Come here and take a look!" replied Bob tersely. "After which I wish

you would please tell me if I'm going blind or nuts or what!"

He remained stationary, with the slab poised aloft. I was at his side in a jiffy. Standing close to him I followed his gaze up at the substance above our heads. And now it was *my* turn to utter a sharp cry of amazement.

"Why Bob! it's it's transparent!"

"Like a sheet of of *plate glass*," added Bob, grimly.

He continued to hold the slab above our heads. We continued to look up at it and through it yes, *through it!* There was the sun beating down mercilessly upon our upturned faces. There was the violet sky. There were the countless pinpoints of light that denoted stars and planets. All visible through this enigmatic substance picked up from beneath our feet.

Bob broke the spell.

"Now look at it," and he slowly lowered the rubbery slice. Bringing it down to the ground, he reversed it and placed it in exactly the same position from which he had lifted it only a few moments ago. Again an exclamation of wonder and surprise burst from my throat. The material now looked just as it did before, dark, solid, opaque.

Again Bob raised the slab over our heads, this time giving it a half turn as he lifted it, so that the surface which was formerly uppermost was now, in the elevated position, on bottom. We peered straight up at this surface

Opaque as a board! My face felt a welcome coolness as the piercing rays from the sun were momentarily cut off.

"Of all the crazy things around here," I blurted out, "this is the *craziest!*"

"Crazy is no word for it," agreed Bob. He replaced the queer material very gingerly. "It's a clear case of *one-way transparency!*"

"And that's something nobody on earth has ever seen. Just think of it, Bob! . . . From one side, a sheet of clear plate glass . . . from the other side, a blank wall . . .!"

"Maybe we just happened to pick a queer piece. Let's try some others."

Bob fell to his knees and pried up a second slab, somewhat larger than the first. I busied myself with another portion some few feet away.

"This one's the same as the other," exclaimed my companion. He turned it over and over above his head. Meantime I had loosened my own plate of ground substance and tried it out for myself. It behaved exactly like the others. Bob and I were now feverishly excited. We forgot stifling heat, the eerie surroundings of this new world . . . everything . . . We dashed about energetically, ripping up portions of the scaly surface, some large, others small, and testing them out at various angles, both on the ground and held up aloft. Without a single exception the slices of spongy material all demonstrated the same phenomenal property—perfect opacity in one direction—perfect transparency in the opposite.

In the excitement of our extraordinary discovery the cube men had been completely forgotten. They were suddenly brought back to our attention again. I looked up to find a swarm of them encircling us at our task. And they showed signs of agitation. They swayed and eddied about us nervously. The energetic motion of their luminous antennae bespoke their state of excitement. Bob and I paused in our investigation of the ground material.

"Looks like they're all steamed up about something," avowed my companion.

"Can it be that . . .?" I didn't finish my query. Bob had stooped to pry loose another section of surface substance. As he lifted it, one of the creatures nearest us disengaged himself from the encircling group and waddled up. His power appendage reached out and arrested the slice of matter in its upward progress. With gentle firmness the substance was forced downward, Bob still holding on in astonishment. The next thing we knew, the section was back on the ground again. A vigorous agitation of the ring of pink bulbs that surrounded us gave evidence that the creatures approved of the mysterious action.

BOB and I looked at each other in bewilderment. "Seems as though they object to our meddling with this stuff," I whispered.

"Just to make sure," Bob returned grimly. He stooped again and clutched another slab. He hoisted it over his head with an air that closely resembled defiance. Foolhardy Bob . . . He always was that way . . . tempting the fates . . .

Well, nothing really serious happened—nothing more serious than a concussion like a clap of thunder—without the noise. As I shot back under the force of the blow, Bob went spinning around grotesquely, landing with a comical *plop* in a sitting position on the ground. The surface slab in question was back in its original spot. The cubical creature that had delivered the lightning blow stood apart from the rest of his fellows, swinging his orbs. They emitted a menacing glow . . .

"And that's *that!*" muttered my friend ruefully, as he picked himself

up from his unconventional position and felt himself over his entire anatomy to see that he was all there. "The matter is definitely settled—and no question about it. These bugs object to our fooling around with their rubber plates. They don't want them pried loose—they don't even want them touched. And they mean business too! . . . that's plain enough, isn't it?" and again he felt his person at the assorted tender spots which had resulted from his precipitous and unceremonious landing—and which would certainly have been more numerous and more tender save for the comparative softness of the medium on which he had landed.

We stopped our investigation of the ground material forthwith. The crowd of cube creatures relaxed. The air of ominous tenseness subsided. Again we found ourselves meandering about the flattened area, while the streams of gelatinous organisms flowed and eddied about us. Momentarily we caught sight of *Green* and *Red*.

"I wonder if they took part in that little demonstration back there," I wondered out loud. "Did you see them, Bob?"

"Can't say that I did," he replied.

"They might have been around, but it was all over in such a flash, I didn't have a chance to observe much."

"Well, it doesn't really matter if they were there or not," I said. "They probably are of the same sentiment as all the rest. These beings must have some pretty strict beliefs about the sacredness of the ground they walk on—otherwise they wouldn't be so all-fired squeamish about anybody touching their old stuff."

"We'll have to look into the matter more fully later on." Bob's rejoinder was pregnant with hidden significance. "But meantime," he added, "I'm feeling right now as though I'm being boiled in oil."

As for my own sensations, I agreed with him heartily. The sun had been climbing steadily all the time. Its heat was now well nigh unbearable.

"We'd better get some relief right soon!" Bob continued, "else there'll be a couple of the grandest cases of heat prostration that ever happened."

"There's only one way I can see out of it just now," I suggested—"and that is to get back to the ship."

"A great idea!" vouchsafed Bob enthusiastically. "Why didn't we think about it before. Come on . . . let's go!"

END OF PART I

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PROBAK JUNIOR

The Isle of Juvenescence

By BOB OLSEN

This story will be welcomed by the admirers of the works of the distinguished author. But independent of the narrative, engrossing as it is, the depiction of the characters is to be followed out with interest, for this detail gives true life to Bob Olsen's story with its happy ending, where at one time all seemed hopeless for the lifelike characters depicted in it.

CHAPTER I

The Mysterious Flyer

"**E**XCUSE me my friend. May I have a word with you?"

Without turning, Phillip Gaynor said good-naturedly, "Listen, buddy. If you're a panhandler, you're wasting your time down here. This is Los Angeles Street. Don't you see that sign?"

The placard toward which he pointed read:

"FEDERAL EMERGENCY RELIEF
ADMINISTRATION"

"Do I look like a panhandler," the stranger challenged.

In order to answer this question intelligently, Gaynor condescended to scrutinize the man who had accosted him. His first impression was that the fellow's face reminded him of a rat. Small, shoe-button eyes, a long, pointed nose, thin lips and a receding chin—all were suggestive of rodent physiognomy—and the illusion was carried out even more strikingly by the stooped shoulders from which the convex visage was thrust out, almost necklessly.

Directing his attention to the man's raiment, Gaynor easily recognized the habiliments as those of a person who

had long been accustomed to affluence and luxury.

"No, mister," Gaynor had to admit. "You certainly do not look like a panhandler or any other kind of a bum. Say, what are you doing down in this part of town, anyway. Don't you know that—"

The man interrupted him with a remark which sounded strangely irrelevant and almost impertinent: "Would you mind removing your hat?"

"Darned if I know what you're driving at," Gaynor grinned, "But I don't mind." Doffing his soiled and delapidated headpiece, he pointed to the stained sweatband and remarked, "See, it's genuine Stetson. Cost me eight bucks—five years ago."

"Just as I thought," the stranger said. "Almost a perfect oval. The size tag seems to be missing, but it looks like a six and seven-eighths. Is that correct?"

"Sure is," Gaynor corroborated his estimate. "And so what?"

"How would you like a job?" the man asked, almost in a whisper.

"How would I like a what?" Gaynor yelled.

"I said how would you like a job—a really good job?" These words were spoken much louder—so loudly in fact that at least a dozen of the candidates



Seeing the thundering machine bearing down on him, Maxim became panic stricken. He dropped the rifle and bolted for cover.

for emergency relief who were loitering near by, pricked up their ears with manifest interest.

"Not so loud," Gaynor cautioned, "or you'll have all the bums on Los Angeles Street flocking around you. You're not kidding are you?"

"Certainly not. Why?"

"Because if you're on the level, all I can say is that a job is the mostest thing that I don't crave for nothing else but."

"Very well, then. Suppose you come along with me. But first let me introduce myself. My name is Thomas Maxim. I'm a surgeon. Perhaps you've heard of my work."

Gaynor hadn't, and although diplomacy prompted him to fib, he said truthfully, "Sorry, doctor, but I'm afraid I'm not as familiar with who's who of the medical profession as I ought to be."

"You're going to hear more of me later," Maxim predicted.

He led the way to a parking lot on East Fourth Street, where he opened the door of a streamlined, ultra-modern coupe and motioned for Gaynor to enter.

As they turned into Main Street and headed southward, Gaynor remarked, "By the way, Doc, what kind of job is this you are offering me?"

The man at the wheel threw out the clutch and pressed his foot against the brake until the car was almost stationary. Then he said, "Perhaps you're not the man I want after all. Maybe I'd better go back to that flop house and select another candidate."

"Aw, please don't get sore," the other pleaded. "You can't blame me for wanting to know what I'm getting into."

"No? Well we may as well have a clear understanding, right at the outset. The man I want for this position

must be as taciturn as an oyster. He must be willing to follow orders without asking questions. Courage is another prerequisite for the job. I'll be frank to tell you that I picked you out from the mob because you looked like you could be depended on, both for discretion and for intestinal valor. If I have made an error, I shall be glad to take you back to the place where I found you."

"Please don't do that, doc," Gaynor entreated him. "You haven't made any mistake. You'll find I can keep my mouth shut. And as for guts—you won't have to worry about that—except—"

"Except what?" Maxim demanded.

"Except that I'm not quite so down and out, that I'm ready to do anything downright crooked. This job of yours—it's on the level, isn't it? Because if it isn't, I guess you had better take me back. Or for that matter you may as well drop me off right here. I'd just as soon walk back."

The doctor's answer was to let in the clutch and bear down on the foot throttle.

"So that's all you're worried about, is it?" he smiled pleasantly. "If so, you may rest assured that this position will be eminently satisfactory to you. It will entail no arduous or difficult labor, the remuneration will be munificent and you will not be required to do anything illegal, immoral or reprehensible."

"Thanks, doc." was Gaynor's grateful response. "That takes a great load off my mind. From now on I'll be as mum as a tongue-tied giraffe."

At a small, privately owned airport on Crenshaw Boulevard, Doctor Maxim turned off the highway and parked his car. Noting his arrival, one of the attendants came running across the field and panted, "Your plane is

ready, Doctor. Shall I bring it out on the runway?"

"If you please," Maxim consented.

Enthusiastic admiration—approval based upon authentic knowledge—beamed in Gaynor's aluminum-gray eyes as they scanned the trim outlines of Maxim's low-winged monoplane. But he didn't say anything to betray his knowing interest.

THERE were two cockpits, each with just enough room for one person to occupy comfortably. Maxim motioned for Gaynor to enter the forward cockpit, while he took his place in the rear one.

Gaynor noted that the plane was of a type such as are used for training student flyers. Originally it had been equipped with dual controls, but the forward joystick had been removed. The instrument panel had also been denuded.

The reason for this became apparent when they reached an altitude which Gaynor estimated to be over a thousand feet. Suddenly the roar of the motor was augmented by a rumbling sound coming from directly above his head. He looked up just in time to see a door slide across the opening of the cockpit, shutting off his view of the sky above and the earth beneath him. Gaynor recognized the device as one which is frequently used for instruction in blind flying.

At first he thought the door had accidentally closed of its own accord, but after he had made several futile attempts to open it and had pounded on the panel until his knuckles ached, he came to the conclusion that Maxim had imprisoned him purposely. Though he resented this indignity, Gaynor realized that there was nothing to do about it.

Since he had no watch he was not able to measure the passage of time with any degree of accuracy. It seems as if several hours elapsed before the drumming of the motor ceased and a series of violent bumps told him that the plane had been set down on a field that was none too smooth. A few moments later, the roof of the cockpit slid back and he saw the rat-like face of Doctor Maxim leering down at him.

Gaynor was about to voice an angry protest, but before he had time to utter a word, Maxim said, "Please let me apologize for shutting off your view. I don't blame you for resenting it, but unfortunately there are certain cogent reasons, why I found it necessary to do this. I'll try to make up for my seeming rudeness by extending to you the cordial hospitality of my home. Kindly hope out and feast your eyes on this beautiful spot. And permit me to welcome you to the Isle of Juvenescence."

"What did you say the name of this place is?" Gaynor asked.

"The Isle of Juvenescence," Maxim repeated. "Presently you'll appreciate the singular appropriateness of that designation."

"I'm more interested in knowing its location," Gaynor told him. "Just where is this island—on the map I mean."

"You seem to have forgotten our bargain," the doctor reminded him. "You are not supposed to ask any questions. Whatever information I desire you to have will be imparted to you."

"O. K. You're the doctor," was Gaynor's cheerful response.

"That's the way to talk," Maxim commended him. "And now, no doubt you are tired and hungry. Let me show you your room. I think you'll

find it more comfortable and more agreeable than your quarters at the flop house on Los Angeles Street."

Turning the plane over to two tough-looking men who came to meet him, Doctor Maxim led the way to a large, two-story stucco structure which stood on a little knoll only a few feet from the edge of the landing field.

The room to which Gaynor was assigned proved to be unusually spacious and attractive. It was tastefully furnished with quaintly designed, hand made furniture which was obviously Spanish in type.

Through the artistic scrolls of a wrought iron grill which covered the solitary window, Gaynor caught entrancing glimpses of a lovely garden beyond which was a steeply sloping, snow-white beach upon which the waters of the Pacific rolled and played. The vegetation consisted principally of lemon trees, palms, acacias, bougainvilleas and other semi-tropical vegetation. A wide expanse of well-kept lawn was bordered with riotously colorful flower beds in which the diversified pastel shades of giant zinnia blooms seemed to predominate.

Opening the door of a bath room walled with green tile, Maxim said, "Perhaps you will want to take a shower before dinner. You will find plenty of clothing of all descriptions in these drawers and closets. Help yourself. From this extensive wardrobe I'm sure you will be able to assemble an outfit of habiliments which will fit you and please your fancy. And now if you will excuse me I'll give instructions concerning the preparation and serving of our dinner. Please come down as soon as you have dressed."

"O. K., doc. And much obliged for your thoughtfulness."

CHAPTER II

An Ominous Discussion

AFTER enjoying a luxurious bath, Gaynor quickly attired himself in a polo shirt, a pair of white flannel trousers and a brown sport-coat. As he stepped from his room to a sort of balcony which led to the stairway, he heard voices. The speakers were invisible to him and Gaynor correctly assumed that they were a considerable distance away from the place where he was standing. Nevertheless, through some weird trick of acoustics, the words were wafted to him with amazing distinctiveness, as if they had been amplified and directed straight toward him from the horn of a megaphone.

Gaynor was not the sort of person who is habitually addicted to eavesdropping, but the mysterious circumstance which had led to his presence there and the startling nature of the first phrase he overheard compelled him to stop and listen for the rest of the conversation.

A voice, which Gaynor recognized as that of Doctor Maxim, said, "I intend to remove his brain and to substitute for it the brain of another person."

"Preposterous!" the other man exclaimed. "You must know that such an experiment as that is doomed in advance to be a wretched failure."

"What makes you feel so sure of that?" Maxim wanted to know. "Other organs have been transplanted successfully. Why not the brain?"

"You're a surgeon," was the answer. "You know as well as I do that transplanting a liver or a ductless gland is relatively simple; but a brain—especially a human brain, with the numerous blood vessels which feed it and the tremendously complicated

systems of nerves which must be connected with utmost precision to enable them to function properly—why the idea is utterly unthinkable.”

“I’ll admit that it sounds that way to an *ordinary* surgeon,” Maxim remarked. “But you seem to forget that I am not an *ordinary* surgeon.”

“No, Doctor Maxim. I haven’t forgotten that you are a very extraordinary surgeon. The new technique you have developed in your experiments with dogs and monkeys is truly phenomenal. But after all, you can’t perform a miracle, not even you, with all your skill and genius, can do that.”

Doctor Maxim chuckled. “Any phenomenon or accomplishment may seem like a miracle to a person who does not understand the underlying principles.”

“Pardon me,” said the other voice. “But you must remember that I too, know something about the human body. I know, for example that there are twelve pairs of main cranial nerves, each of which like a telephone trunk-line cable, is made up of an enormous number of smaller nerves. Each of these nerves leads to a certain part of the body and has an essential function to perform.”

Gaynor was not a medical man, but he had studied a great deal of anatomy. Consequently he was able to follow with reasonable intelligence the somewhat technical discourse which then ensued.

“Let’s illustrate by describing briefly just one of the twenty-four cranial nerves,” the speaker continued. “Take the trigeminal nerve as an example. As you know, it has four branches. The first division is the ophthalmic nerve, a sensory nerve. It is further subdivided into the nerves which supply the eyeball, lachrymal gland, mucous linings of the eye and

nasal passages, the integument of the eyebrow, forehead, nose, and so forth. Other branches of the trigeminal nerve connect with the teeth, nose and tongue. Once a nerve like the trigeminal is severed it would be an impossible task to connect it again in such a way that each of these individual nerves would perform its proper function. It would be like trying to splice a telegraph cable made up of thousands of wires with nothing to distinguish them from each other, and then expect each of those wires to connect exactly the same stations as they did before the cable was cut.”

“I’ll grant you that a task such as you describe would be rather difficult,” Doctor Maxim conceded. “But who said anything about severing the trigeminal, or any of the other cranial nerves and then attempting to splice them?”

“How else could you remove the brain from one person and transplant it to another man’s skull with any hope of success?”

Even Gaynor was astounded at Doctor Maxim’s answer:

“With the system which I have perfected, I shall be able to remove all, or at least most of the nerves with the brain. Then I shall exchange the brain of one person for that of another, connecting each individual nerve where it belongs.”

The response to this amazing statement was a laugh, which was half mirthful and half derisive.

“What are you snickering at?” Maxim demanded.

“Surely, Doctor Maxim, surely you do not expect me to accept such an utterly nonsensical statement as that seriously.”

“What makes you think that statement is nonsensical?”

"Because it involves difficulties which are even more preposterous and more unsurmountable than the idea of splicing nerves. You know, of course, that many of these nerves must pass through foramina—some of them so small that you would have difficulty in threading the finest hair through the passageways. How do you propose to accomplish that, Doctor Maxim?"

"Again I must remind you that I am not an ordinary surgeon," Maxim replied. "It may interest you to know that I have invented a device which enables me to operate in hyperspace. Did you ever hear about the fourth dimension?"

"Of course I have. But surely you are not going to insult my intelligence by trying to make me believe that such a ridiculously impossible thing as a fourth dimension actually exists."

"I shall not only assert that the fourth dimension actually exists, but I shall also take pleasure presently in giving you a demonstration which I am sure will convince even a doubting Thomas like you."

"Thank you, Doctor Maxim. Naturally I shall welcome such an opportunity. But I still fail to see what the fourth dimension has to do with the possible success of your experiment."

"Only this. It happens that certain three dimensional objects—like the human body, for instance—which are completely enclosed by a skin or other outer covering,—are really wide open in the direction of the fourth dimension. The best way to understand that is to picture the limitations of an imaginary creature having only two dimensions as compared with a three dimensional man. To the two dimensional being, an architect's floor plan would be like a completely enclosed building. He would not be able to enter

any of the rooms depicted on the plan unless openings were provided in the ink lines. It would be impossible for him to see the plan as a whole—a thing which is simple for three dimensional creatures like ourselves."

"And do you mean to infer that, by operating in hyperspace as you call it, you can see the interior of the human body with all the organs, nerves and blood vessels exposed, like—well like they are sometimes shown on an anatomy chart?"

"That is a very good analogy," Doctor Maxim responded. "Except that the anatomy chart shows the internal structure of the body as it would look if viewed from only one direction. When I use my hyperspace machine I can look at any part of the body's interior from any direction I desire. Furthermore, I can, if I desire, handle or operate on any internal portion of the body without even making an incision in the skin."

For a while there was silence. Apparently Doctor Maxim's companion was speechless. Gaynor was about to walk toward the stairs when he heard Maxim's voice again.

"I don't blame you for being incredulous, Doctor Hughes. Naturally all this sounds preposterous to you. But, after all, you can't deny the evidence of your own senses. You have already seen some of the triumphs I have achieved single-handed in my experiments on animals. No doubt I could be equally successful with human beings without any outside assistance. However, I realize that I must be much more careful when I am dealing with human life. That's why I asked you to come here and help me. Later on it may be necessary for you to perform the entire operation alone. As far as my hyperspace machine is concerned, I can easily con-

vince you that it really does what I claim for it. A five minute demonstration will convert you, I am sure. What do you say, Doctor Hughes—are you with me?"

"Before I reply to that question would you mind answering one?"

"I shall be glad to do so. What's on your mind?"

"Just what do you expect to accomplish by this experiment?"

"Many things. Perhaps the most important is that it will make it possible for a really superior brain—like mine, for example—to keep on living for many centuries."

"You mean?"—This came in an almost inaudible whisper.

Doctor Maxim also lowered his voice, so much so in fact that Gaynor was not able to hear anything more than confused murmurs.

After listening for a minute or two without catching another intelligible word, Gaynor went to the stairway, and taking care to make enough noise to attract attention, strode down the ornately tiled steps.

CHAPTER III

The Nocturnal Visitor

WHEN Gaynor reached the foot of the stairs, he found his host waiting for him. Conducting him to a small den adjoining the living room, Maxim said, "Please step in here, Mr. Gaynor. I want you to meet my friend, Doctor Hughes."

The man who rose to acknowledge this introduction was tall and gaunt. He had an unusually high forehead, which was overemphasized by his shiny, almost hairless pate. That his baldness was premature was obviously testified by his trim, slender figure and his flawless, rubicund complexion.

When he spoke, Gaynor recognized his voice as the one he had heard in the conversation with Doctor Maxim.

"Will you join us in a sloe gin fizz?" Maxim said, pointing to an array of bottles.

"No thanks."

"Don't tell us you are a teetotaler?"

"Not exactly, but I don't feel like drinking just now, thank you."

For a few minutes they talked about commonplace things. Then the butler, who had a cauliflower ear and looked like a retired fighter, announced that dinner was ready.

The banquet that followed was an epicurean masterpiece. While the meal was in progress Doctor Maxim studiously avoided any reference to his purpose in bringing Gaynor to his island home. Phillip himself was too busy enjoying the culinary treat to ask any personal questions.

But when the soufflé glasses had been removed and the thick, fragrant perfectos had been lighted, Gaynor leaned back, sighed contentedly, and said, "Excuse me, Doctor Maxim. Would you mind telling me just what the nature of this job of mine is to be?"

With surprising amiability, Maxim answered, "I shall be glad to do so. Mr Gaynor, you have been selected for a very notable honor."

"Thanks," Phillip grinned. "And may I ask what that honor might be?"

"You are to be the first person to get the benefit of my greatest achievement—the Thomas Maxim system of rejuvenation."

"What's that?" Gaynor exclaimed. "Did I understand you to say that you want to rejuvenate me?"

"That is correct, Mr. Gaynor. For many years I have been working on—"

Maxim was interrupted by a loud burst of uncontrolled laughter.

Glaring at his guest, the surgeon snapped, "I fail to see any sensible reason for this unseemly mirth, Mr. Gaynor."

"You wouldn't," Gaynor giggled. "But if you knew anything about my—about my biological urges, you would know that I don't feel the need for rejuvenation—not yet. Quite the reverse, I assure you."

"Who said anything about biological urges?" was Maxim's indignant response. "My system has a much more important purpose than what you seem to have assumed in that depraved mind of yours."

Instead of resenting this insult, Phillip said, somewhat contritely, "Sorry, doctor, but I'm afraid you got me wrong. I'm really not depraved—just normal, that's all. Maybe I look a lot older than I really am. Believe it or not, my age is only twenty-eight."

"I would have estimated it less than that," Maxim told him.

"Really? Then what makes you think I need rejuvenating? Why didn't you pick some old geezer with store teeth and rheumatic joints? There are plenty of them where you found me."

"The main reason is that I want to make sure that my first human case will be an outstanding success. I may as well be frank with you, Gaynor. My method of rejuvenation requires a somewhat complicated, major operation. With an elderly man there might be some doubt concerning its outcome. However in the case of a young and healthy man like yourself I am sure it will be successful. That's why I have decided to give you the first opportunity. Later on, as a result of the knowledge gained, I shall be able to

perform the operation safely on older persons."

"You mean you want to use me as a sort of guinea pig—for experimental purposes?"

"Not exactly. It is true that you will be my first human subject, but I have long since completed my periods of experimentation and I have definitely proved the feasibility of my system by operating on a large number of animals closely resembling human beings. You will be interested to know that during the past two years not a single one of my animal patients has died."

"Interesting if true," was Gaynor's comment. "Nevertheless, I don't think I care for the job." He rose from the table and was about to leave, but Doctor Maxim placed a restraining hand on his wrist. Though the grip was not painful, Phillip instinctively realized that formidable and latent strength lurked in the surgeon's large, beautifully proportioned fingers.

In a tone that sounded like a saw rasping across a rusty nail, Maxim said, "Please be seated."

Gaynor thought it best to obey.

Releasing his hold on his guest's wrist, Doctor Maxim remarked affably, "Before you decide in haste, perhaps you ought to learn some of the details of my proposal."

"O. K. Shoot!"

"I have already given you my assurance that the operation is bound to be successful. Naturally there will be a slight element of danger, but I feel sure that we may safely ignore that possibility. As an extra precaution I have enlisted the aid of Doctor Hughes here. Perhaps you have never heard of him but I can assure you that Doctor Hughes is the most competent surgeon available."

"With the exception of yourself, Doctor Maxim," Hughes interposed.

"Thank you," Maxim smiled. "In this particular field, perhaps—"

"All right," Gaynor interrupted him. "I'll concede that both of you are good. And so what?"

"Naturally you will be interested in the compensation you will obtain in return for your—your co-operation. In the first place you may be certain that you will receive the very best of care both before and after the operation. From what you have already seen, you know that I am a wealthy man and that I am in a position to gratify any desire you may have."

"I haven't any doubt of that," Gaynor conceded.

"Furthermore—in case the result of the rejuvenation does not meet with your approval—I shall be glad to restore you to your present condition. You will be at liberty to remain here as my guest as long as you please or to leave here whenever you please. As a reward for your help I shall pay you the sum of ten thousand dollars."

"Ten thousand dollars!" Gaynor exclaimed. "Did you say ten thousand?"

"Ten thousand is right. And if that isn't enough, we'll make it fifteen thousand. What do you say, Gaynor? Is it a bargain?"

"Do I have to give you my answer right away?"

"Certainly not. Take as much time as you please. In the meantime, please bear in mind that you are my guest and that everything I have is at your disposal. I aim to make my hospitality flawless. Is there anything I can do now to contribute to your comfort or pleasure?"

"No, thanks, doctor. All I want is a little shut-eye. That bed upstairs looked mighty alluring to me. It's been

so long since I enjoyed a decent night's sleep with a room all to myself, that I can't think of anything that would be more of a treat. So, if you don't mind, I think I'll turn in right away."

DESPITE his weariness and despite the flawless comforts of his accommodations, Gaynor found it impossible to sleep. For several hours he tossed restlessly on his luxuriously appointed bed. His wakefulness was partly due to the fact that he had much to think about. Still another factor which prevented him from sleeping was the unearthly silence, which seemed to engulf him like a gigantic pillow that was being used to smother him.

The noise which he finally heard was soft and innocuous, yet it startled him like a shriek of pain. It was the padding of slippers on the carpeted floor of the corridor.

Some atavistic instinct told Gaynor that this sound spelled danger. Quickly and quietly he slipped out of bed and darted into the bath-room adjoining his chamber. He had scarcely reached the shelter of the lavatory when he heard the hinges of his bedroom door squeak.

Someone—someone who was obviously striving to tread cautiously—entered the chamber. As the midnight visitor passed the window the moonlight cast a grotesque shadow across the bed. Distorted as it was, Gaynor recognized the rat-like profile of Doctor Maxim.

Acting on a sudden impulse, Gaynor snapped on the bath-room light. In a voice which he tried to make sound casual but which trembled in spite of himself, he said, "Good evening, Doctor Maxim."

The figure, which by this time was

bending over the bed, jumped back as if he had touched a red hot stove and uttered a low cry of surprise.

There was ample light for Gaynor to observe that Maxim was holding something white in his hand, which he quickly thrust in the pocket of his bathrobe. The room was reeking with the sweetly sickening odor of chloroform.

"Oh, excuse me—that is I hope I didn't disturb you," Maxim stammered. "I came to see if you had enough covers. Along toward morning it always gets pretty cold here on Juvenescence Island, and I thought—that is—I came in to see if you had enough covers."

"I heard you the first time," Gaynor told him. "It is mighty nice of you to be so solicitous of my comfort. However, you might have spared yourself the trouble. There are plenty of covers on my bed, I can assure you of that."

"And are you sure that there isn't anything else you might need?"

"Right now there is one thing I need, Doctor Maxim."

"And that is?"

"Solitude."

"Oh, yes. I understand. Like the famous movie star, you want to be al-loon." With a chuckle that sounded like the cry of a hyena, Doctor Maxim shuffled out of the room.

Gaynor switched on the bed-lamp and examined the door. There was no key in the lock, neither was there a bolt or other mechanism to fasten the door. He made up for this omission by tilting a high-backed chair against the door with its back under the knob. Then, fully confident that he would be safe from intrusion for the rest of the night, he slipped into bed and almost instantly fell into a sound slumber.

CHAPTER IV

The Beautiful Captive

AT the breakfast table the following morning Doctor Maxim said nothing about his nocturnal visit to his guest's room. Neither did he refer to their post-prandial conversation of the previous evening.

It was necessary for Gaynor to introduce the subject himself.

"Well, doctor," he said, as he carefully folded his napkin and placed it beside his plate, "I want to thank you for your wonderful hospitality and to tell you that I appreciate the generous offer you made to me last night. Nevertheless, I am sorry to say that—"

"One moment, Mr. Gaynor," Maxim interrupted him. "Before you go any further, let me assure you that you do not need to hurry about rendering your decision. On the contrary, I should advise you to take plenty of time to consider the matter."

"I don't need any more time to consider it. My mind is made up— positively and definitely."

"You mean?"

"I mean that I don't wish to accept the job you offered me. In accordance with your promise, I must ask you to take me back to Los Angeles at once."

"Why at once?" Maxim demanded.

Gaynor grinned and said, "Of course I didn't mean that we would have to leave right this minute. But so long as the deal is off, I don't see much use in hanging around here."

"Am I to infer that you have important business to transact elsewhere?" was Maxim's sarcastic query.

"I don't think that remark calls for an answer," Gaynor retorted. "You know of course that I am just a bum, with no place to go and nothing to do."

"Then why don't you stay here? I told you last night that you are welcome to remain as long as you wish. Isn't this better than beans and stew and the flop-house accommodations at the F. E. R. A.?"

"Certainly this is better. A comparison would be ridiculous. You have no idea what it has meant to me to get even this brief taste of the luxury I used to enjoy."

"Then why don't you stay—for a day or two, anyway?"

"Because my mind is definitely made up. I am positive that I shall never change it. Under the circumstances it would be hardly fair for me to accept any more of your generous hospitality. I have only one favor to ask of you and that is that you take me back to Los Angeles to-day."

"Very well then. If you insist on being a fool, I suppose there is nothing more to be done about it. When do you wish to leave?"

"Whenever it is convenient for you."

Maxim signalled to the butler and said, "Tell Nichols to get the plane ready. I'll be leaving in ten minutes."

"Thank you Doctor Maxim," Gaynor said. "I'll run upstairs and put on my old togs."

After he had changed his clothes, Gaynor stepped to the window to take his last look at Maxim's lovely garden. Just as he did so, he heard a shrill sound, which sounded like a woman's muffled scream.

Looking in the direction from which the sound had come he saw a startling sight. Out on the lawn stood a girl. She was clad only in a scanty, nightgown. The girl was at least fifty yards away, but even at that distance, Gaynor was sure that she was young and beautiful. There certainly could be no

doubt about the youthfulness and shapeliness of her figure.

Accompanying the girl was an unusually large woman who was dressed in the uniform of a trained nurse. Tall and brawny, she towered over the other like a gorilla fighting with a lamb.

Despite the hopeless handicap of her small size, the girl was putting up a real battle. Gaynor couldn't help admiring her grit as she squirmed and twisted and kicked in her unsuccessful efforts to free herself from the rough grasp of her burly antagonist. Obviously, the big woman had her hands full. But the contest ended abruptly when two tough-looking men came running to assist the harassed nurse. With no more delicacy than a pair of stevedores handling a sack of junk, they picked the girl up and bundled her into the house.

Gaynor's first impulse was to rush to the girl's assistance. He was half way down the stairs when the thought suddenly came to him that, if he really wanted to help her, he could accomplish more by waiting until a favorable opportunity presented itself. Accordingly he walked quietly back to his room and again changed his attire.

Descending to the living room, Gaynor stopped on the broad patio, from which he could obtain an unobstructed view of the landing field. The monoplane was not on the runway. Around the hangar there were no signs of activity, the doors of the building being closed and locked. This could only mean that Maxim's order had either been countermanded or had been disregarded for some other reason.

Hearing footsteps behind him, Gaynor turned. Doctor Maxim was approaching. With him was the thick-eared butler and another huge man who appeared to be even more pug-

nacious than his colleague. They didn't exactly look playful as they slouched menacingly toward Gaynor.

"Oh, good morning, Doctor," Gaynor hastened to say. "You'll be interested to know that I've changed my mind after all."

"You mean you have decided to accept my offer? You will consent to undergo the experi—I mean the operation."

"Perhaps," Gaynor hedged. "At any rate, I have decided to follow your suggestion and take plenty of time to think it over. In the meantime, if you still feel as hospitable as you indicated a while ago, I shall remain here as your guest."

"Very well." Addressing his two husky companions, Maxim said, "That will be all, Hawkins. I shan't need you and Nichols after all." Then to Gaynor he remarked, "You have made a wise decision, my friend."

"I hope so," was Gaynor's optimistic comment.

CHAPTER V

A Horrible Awakening

GAYNOR spent most of the morning exploring Juvenescence Island. Almost symmetrical in its conformation, it reminded him of an enormous lima bean. He estimated that it was about four miles long and three miles wide. Except for the portion just east of the house, where a sugar-white beach rimmed a crescent-shaped bay, the shores of the island were rocky and precipitous. Though he traversed the entire coast line, Gaynor did not see a boat nor any place where a craft of any kind could be concealed. Apparently there was no way to get away from the island except in Maxim's airplane.

Returning to the garden, Gaynor went to the spot where he had seen the girl and her assailants that morning. He easily located the door through which she had been carried into the house. Approaching it on tip-toe, he tried it cautiously. It was locked.

The windows on that side of the house were about ten feet from the ground. They were guarded by ornamental, wrought iron grills and were heavily curtained. With the aid of a red-leaved plum tree which was growing close to the house, Gaynor clambered up until his eyes were just above the level of one of the window sills. He had hoped to find an opening between the curtain and the edges of the window, but in this he was disappointed.

While he was busily engaged in this unsuccessful snooping, he heard a cough and looked down to see the man, whom Maxim had called Nichols.

"I beg pardon," the fellow said with assumed politeness. "Is there anything you would like, Mr. Gaynor?"

Perched in the tree, like a youngster caught in the act of stealing fruit, Gaynor felt rather sheepish.

"No thank you," he grinned. "I was just climbing this tree to get a bit of exercise."

"If you want to shinney up a tree, you'd better pick one that ain't so close to the house," Nichols snarled. Pointing to an enormous eucalyptus, at least fifty feet tall, he added, "Like that one."

"Thanks for the suggestion," Gaynor said. "But I think I've done enough climbing for today."

"I think so too."

After lunch, Gaynor attempted to explore the house. So long as he kept away from the southern wing of the building no one paid any attention to

him. But he hadn't taken more than a dozen steps, along the corridor leading toward the place where he had seen the girl disappear, when he was accosted by Hawkins.

The butler greeted Gaynor with the formula which he had already heard that day, "Is there something you would like, sir?"

"Nothing, thank you," Gaynor assured him. "Nothing at all. I believe I'll go to the library and read for a while."

"An excellent idea, Mr. Gaynor. May I show you the way?"

"No thanks. I know where it is."

At dinner, Maxim, seemingly abandoning his suave manner asked bluntly: "Well, Gaynor, have you made up your mind yet?"

"Not yet," was Phillip's reply. "If you don't mind, I'd like to sleep on it. I promise to give you my answer in the morning."

When he reached his bed-room that night he was surprised to see a book on the table beside his bed. It was Ouispinsky's "Tertium Organum." Outwardly the volume looked forbiddingly dry, but when he opened it and began to read he found it delightfully interesting.

Since he had decided on a night of watchfulness, Gaynor was grateful for the diversion provided by this entertaining book. Settling himself in a comfortable, leather-upholstered arm chair, he prepared for a long siege of wakefulness.

Despite Gaynor's firm determination to remain awake all night, drowsiness stole upon him surreptitiously, like a cat sneaking up on a sparrow. Before he realized what was happening, the book slipped out of his hands, his head slumped back on the leather cushion of his chair and he fell into a sound slumber.

When he awoke he was in a different room—a much smaller, much plainer room. The only furniture it contained was a battered dresser, an unpainted kitchen chair and the cheap, iron bed on which he lay. Through a blurry haze which seemed to envelope him, Gaynor noted the glitter of four brass knobs about the size of handballs, which "ornamented" the head and foot of his bed.

As his mind groped its way through a fog of semi-consciousness, Phillip suddenly became cognizant of excruciating pain, which shot through his head and face as if his skull were being slowly crushed between the jaws of a powerful vise. By exerting a great deal of effort, he managed to get his right hand out from under the covers and felt of his face. Except for his eyes and mouth, his head was completely swathed in thick bandages.

For what seemed like many hours he lay there, suffering the torments of a medieval inquisition. Then the door opened and a woman entered. At first she seemed to loom above him like a shapeless lump of greyish putty; but gradually as his eyes learned to focus properly he was able to distinguish the outlines of her form and her features. She was unusually large and Gaynor thought she looked a great deal like the nurse whom he had seen struggling with the girl in the garden.

OBSERVING that his eyes were open, the nurse said, "Hello, Phillip. So you're awake, are you?"

He tried to say something but the only sound which came from his parched lips was a high pitched gurgle.

Placing her coarse fingers over his mouth, the nurse said: "You mustn't try to talk. I'm Miss Stone. You call me Frances. You've been unconscious for several days. I think I'd better get

the doctor. Don't stir until we get back."

In a few minutes she returned, bringing with her two men. Gaynor finally controlled his eyes sufficiently to recognize them. They were Doctor Maxim and Doctor Hughes.

"Well, Hughes," Maxim said in a bragging tone. "It looks like our experiment is a success."

"I'm not so certain of that," the other physician responded. "The fact, that your patient is conscious, doesn't necessarily mean that his brain is functioning normally."

"Want to put up a bet on that?"

With an expression of distaste, Hughes answered, "No thank you. I'm not in the habit of betting—especially concerning matters of this sort."

Maxim approached the bed and felt the patient's pulse in a perfunctory manner, without looking at his watch.

"Know me?" he asked.

By making a mighty effort, Gaynor managed to murmur, "Of course." His voice sounded strangely distorted. It had a quavery, treble timbre, like the voice of a boy when he approaches adolescence.

"Can you remember your own name?" the doctor went on.

"Sure," said the childish soprano voice. "My name is Phillip Gaynor."

Turning to Hughes, Doctor Maxim cried triumphantly, "There you are! Now are you convinced?"

"Completely," Doctor Hughes admitted. "Permit me to congratulate you on the accomplishment of your purpose."

"Thank you. And now that we know that our experiment is a success, suppose we stage a little celebration."

He was about to open the door when Gaynor found his voice again.

"Oh, doctor," he squealed.

"What is it, my boy?"

"I want to know what you have done to me."

"You'll find out in due time."

"But I must know right now."

The only response which Maxim gave to this was a sardonic laugh—the sort of laugh which every proficient villain of the stage or screen always gives when he knows he has the helpless hero in his full power.

Doctor Hughes and the nurse were already in the corridor. Maxim followed them, slamming the door shut behind him. Phillip heard the grating of the key as the door was locked from the outside.

Gaynor had no way of keeping track of the time, but he estimated that several weeks elapsed after the day he regained consciousness until he was permitted to get out of bed and dress himself.

Long before that time he made the astounding discovery that the body he now possessed was that of a small boy, who couldn't be more than six years old!

CHAPTER VI

The Imprisoned Beauty

ONE morning, as he was looking out of his window at Doctor Maxim's beautiful garden, Gaynor saw something which made his heart miss a beat or two. It was a tall, huskily built man. Clad in a tightly fitting bathing suit he was carrying—of all things—a toy bucket and a tiny shovel.

He was too far away to enable Gaynor to distinguish any pertinent details of form or features, but there was something about the fellow's general appearance that seemed puzzlingly familiar to him. With fascinated gaze, Gaynor watched the man in the bathing suit as he skipped boyishly to

the crescent-shaped beach and began to play in the sugar-white sand.

Determined to solve the mystery of the man's identity, Gaynor ran out of the house and hastened toward the beach. If any of the servants noticed his departure, they made no effort to restrain him.

When Phillip's small sandals began crunching into the loose sand, the man turned and Gaynor was astonished to see that his face was bearded with a course, sorrel-hued stubble. Nevertheless the pale blue eyes which peered ingenuously at Gaynor were unmistakably those of a very young child.

These two peculiarities were so incongruous that they confused Phillip for a few seconds. But as his eyes ran rapidly over the man's other features and lineaments, he recognized so many intimate details that he convinced himself of that person's identity, despite the contradictory evidence of the beard and the juvenile eyes.

It was Gaynor's own body!

Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that it was the body which Gaynor had previously possessed but which now had obviously become the property of someone else.

Evidently Gaynor's amazement was shared by the other person, for he stared at Gaynor's diminutive form with bulging eyes. Pointing at him with a childish gesture, the fellow in the bathing suit stammered. "Why you—you—you are ME!"

Gaynor nodded.

In his childish treble he said, "Guess you're right, buddy. I'm you and you're me. Sounds crazy doesn't it? True, though. You see, kid, I happen to know how it was done. They kidnapped you, didn't they kid? Doctor Maxim brought you here and put you out with ether. When you woke up

your head was all bandaged up. Ached like the dickens, didn't it? Then you found out you had grown to be a big man. Am I right or am I wrong?"

"Sure you're right," the other man answered. "But how come you know all this."

"Because they did the same thing to me. Don't you understand, buddy? Doctor Maxim switched our bodies. He put your brain in my head and my brain in your head. That's why I look like you and you look like me."

"You mean they took away myself and gave me yourself instead?"

"That's it exactly."

"But I don't want yourself. I want myself. Please give it back to me."

"Wish I could, buddy. But I can't. The only one who can do that is Doctor Maxim, and it's going to be a tough job to force him to do it. But we can try. Maybe if you and I stick together we may be able to do something about it. Are you with me, kid?"

"Sure I am," and his large, muscular fist enveloped Gaynor's tiny hand.

"What's your name, kid?" Gaynor asked.

"Jackie Washburn. What's yours?"

"Phillip Gaynor. You call me Phil."

"O. K., Phil."

"Where do you live, Jackie?"

"At 3542 Indiana Street in San Diego. Want to know my phone number?"

"Sure. Let me have it. I'll memorize it. Maybe I'll call up your dad sometime."

Jackie gave him the number, and Gaynor repeated it several times.

"Do you really think?"—Jackie started to say.

He was interrupted by a musical, feminine voice which called out, "Hello there!"

"Hello yourself," Jackie answered.

Gaynor turned. Approaching him with the light springy step of a trained athlete was the girl he had seen struggling with the big nurse on the day after his arrival at Juvenescence Island.

On that memorable occasion, distance had lent enchantment to her struggling figure and he had assured himself that she must have been young and beautiful. Seeing her now at close range, he concluded that his first impression had been altogether too conservative.

She was more than beautiful. In her large, brown, heavily lashed eyes gleamed a spiritual light which told him that she possessed a gracious character as well as an adorable body.

Overwhelmed by her incomparable loveliness, Phillip was speechless. He just stood there with his mouth open, devouring her beauty with bulging eyes.

Before he realized what she was going to do, the girl picked Gaynor up in her arms and planted a warm kiss, full on his lips. Then she sat down on the sand, holding him affectionately in her lap.

"You sweet thing!" she exclaimed. "I think you're awfully nice!"

Embarrassed beyond words, Gaynor broke away from her. She caught his hand and drew him toward her again.

"Don't be bashful, little boy," she coaxed. "I won't hurt you. Come here and sit on my lap again."

Gaynor could feel the hot blood suffusing his cheeks and he knew he was blushing, which annoyed him terribly.

"I'd like to," he managed to stammer. "But you see, I really am a grown up man—and—well—I'm afraid it isn't exactly proper."

At this her red lips parted and she laughed heartily.

GAYNOR noticed that her teeth were unusually even and that they were flashingly white.

"So you think you're grown up, do you?" she chuckled. "Am I so ugly that you feel like running away from me?"

"Why no. Not at all," he hastened to assure her. "On the contrary, I think you are incomparably beautiful. In fact, you are the most pulchritudinous lady I have ever had the good fortune to observe."

"My!" she exclaimed. "What big words for such a little fellow to use! Come here, won't you, dear? I want to talk to you."

He consented to sit down, not in her lap but in the sand beside her. When she put her arm around him he offered no objections.

Meanwhile the man who called himself Jackie Washburn had picked up his ridiculous shovel and bucket and had trotted down to the water's edge, where he began to fill the pail with moist sand.

"My name is Thelma Goodwin," the girl said. "What's your name, little boy?"

"Phillip Gaynor," he answered. "But please don't call me 'Little boy.' I really am a mature man. The reason why—"

"I only wish you were a man, Phillip," she said in a wistful tone. "You see, I'm in trouble. If you were a big man, perhaps you could help me."

"That's exactly what I am going to do," he told her. "I know all about it. You're not only in trouble—you are in danger; and you don't realize how horrible that danger is. But don't be afraid. I'm going to look after you!"

She drew him closer to her, kissing him over his right eyebrow.

"You're a peculiar boy, Phillip," she murmured. "Peculiar, but awfully

sweet. You really do talk like a grown-up man, but of course—"

She was interrupted by the drumming of an airplane motor.

They both gazed skyward. Gaynor recognized Maxim's monoplane.

"That must be Doctor Maxim!" Miss Goodwin exclaimed. "I think I'd better go back to my room. Perhaps it's just as well not to let him know that I've talked to you, Phillip. But I hope I'll see you again soon."

"So do I," he responded. "And before you go, please tell me something."

"Certainly. What is it, my dear?"

"How did you manage to get away from the house? Isn't that roughneck Amazon supposed to be guarding you?"

"Oh, you mean Miss Stone? Yes, she is supposed to be my keeper. But I didn't have any trouble in getting away from her today. You see she and Nichols and Hawkins took advantage of Doctor Maxim's absence to stage a little party. All of them were drinking rather heavily last night. That's probably the reason why they didn't bother us this morning."

"And what about Doctor Hughes? Didn't he stay on the island during Maxim's absence?"

"I think he did. But he spends most of his time in the laboratory. He doesn't seem to care what's happening. Now I'll have to be going."

"Please tell me one thing more."

"Yes."

"Which room do you occupy?"

"It's on the second floor, on this side of the house. You see that window up there that's about one-quarter open?"

"You mean the fourth window, counting from the south end of the house?"

"Yes. That's it."

"O. K. Now don't worry, will you,

Miss Goodwin? I know you still think I'm only a child, but just the same, I have a man's brain in my cranium and I'm going to figure out some way to get you out of this jam."

Bending down, she kissed him again and said, "Thank you, Phillip. I'm proud to have you as my defender. And now, good bye—for just a little while, I hope."

"I hope so, too," he said. "*Au revoir!*"

He watched her until she disappeared within the house.

Then he trotted over to the landing field.

Just as he arrived there, he saw Doctor Maxim climb out of the monoplane. In his arms was a little girl, whom Gaynor estimated to be about five years old. She was kicking and screaming with fright. In an attempt to silence her, Doctor Maxim was holding his hairy hand over her mouth.

"Stone! Hawkins! Somebody come and take this brat off my hands." Furiously Maxim roared, "Where the devil is everybody?"

Apparently he did not notice Gaynor, who was on the other side of the airplane. At any rate he paid no attention to him. With impatient, angry strides, he stalked into the house with the squirming girl still held tightly in his arms.

Gaynor followed him.

CHAPTER VII

Gaynor Defies Doctor Maxim

AS Gaynor entered the house he saw Doctor Maxim and Miss Stone, the nurse, standing in the hall near the foot of the stairway. The nurse was carrying the little girl in her arms.

"Lock her in the room next to Miss Goodwin's," Maxim commanded in an angry voice. "And you'd better lay off my booze if you know what's good for you."

"Yes, Doctor," Miss Stone said meekly as she started up the stairs with her struggling burden. Maxim strode into the room which he called his den, slamming the door behind him.

Gaynor thought it best to wait for a few minutes to give the doctor time to calm down a bit. Nevertheless, when he finally knocked on the door, the voice which roared, "Come in!" did not sound very cordial.

With somewhat of an effort, Phillip turned the knob and opened the door.

He expected an angry greeting and was rather surprised when Doctor Maxim said in a tone which he manifestly was trying to make sound friendly.

"Oh, hello there, Phillip. So it's you is it? How are you feeling to-day?"

"I'm feeling O. K., Doctor. But there's something I want to talk to you about."

"Very well. What is it?"

"It's about Miss Goodwin."

"What's that?"

"I want to talk to you about Miss Goodwin."

"What the dickens do you know about Miss Goodwin?"

"Never mind what I know about her or how I found it out. Before you go any further there's one thing I want you to understand, Doctor Maxim."

"Yes?" the surgeon snarled.

"Yes. I want you to understand that you're not going to play the same trick on Miss Goodwin that you did on me. Is that clear?"

"Who said I was going to play any tricks on Miss Goodwin?"

"Before I answer that, suppose you tell me why you brought that little girl to Juvenescence Island?"

"That's none of your confounded business."

"Well, Doctor, whether it's my business or not, I'll tell you why you brought that child here. You kidnapped her because she happened to have a head that is just about the same size and shape as Miss Goodwin's. Isn't that the reason?"

Maxim didn't answer. He merely sniffed.

Gaynor continued. "I know what your game is. You're planning to perform operations on Miss Goodwin and that little girl—just as you did with Jackie Washburn and me. You think you are going to put Miss Goodwin's brain in the skull of that child and transfer the child's brain to Miss Goodwin's cranium. That's your plan, now isn't it, Maxim? I'll dare you to deny it."

"Suppose I don't deny it. Suppose I tell you that you're right. Suppose I admit that I intend to do exactly what you just said. What about it? Who is going to stop me?"

Standing on tiptoes and striving to throw out his diminutive chest, Gaynor declared, "I am!"

Maxim chuckled. No one could have blamed him, for his defiant answer coming from such a weak and puerile source was enough to make anyone laugh.

"You think that's funny, do you" Gaynor yelled in his thin, soprano voice. "Let me tell you something, Doctor Maxim. I don't know what the law says in matters of this sort, but there's one thing I do know and that is that in California kidnapping is a capital crime. If you'll lay off Miss

Goodwin and if you'll take that child back to her parents, I'll promise not to testify against you. But if you don't leave her alone, I'll see you hanged if it's the last thing I do!"

Again Maxim sniffed. Without uttering another word, he jabbed at a button. Presently the door opened and Hawkins entered.

"You rang, sir?" the servant asked.

"Yes. Please escort Mr. Gaynor to his room and lock the door—from the outside."

Gaynor put up a good fight, although he knew it was a futile one. He had the satisfaction of sinking his tiny fist into Doctor Maxim's expansive abdomen before Hawkins picked him up and carried him kicking and scratching, back to his room. The clicking of the key in the lock told him that Hawkins had carried out his master's command and had locked the door from the outside.

Although Gaynor had been over his room many times before, he again made a thorough inspection of the small chamber in the hope of hitting upon some method of escaping from it.

The door was exceedingly massive—altogether too stout for a dwelling house, Gaynor observed. Not only was it staunchly constructed of thick oak timbers, but it was also reinforced with formidable looking bronze bars. Even a strong man armed with a heavy battering ram would not have been able to make any appreciable impression on that stalwart portal.

Equally impregnable was the window, which was covered with a heavy, ornamental grill—ostensibly for decoration, but in reality to prevent the inmate's escape.

One thing, however, Doctor Maxim seemed to have overlooked. The transom. To be sure it was tightly closed.

Furthermore, the fixtures had been installed in such a way that it could be opened only from the hall. Nevertheless that small glass window over the door admitted a light which spelled hope to Gaynor's ingenious mind.

THERE was a small table in the room. Phillip dragged it to the door and placed a wooden chair on top of it. This wasn't quite high enough, so he pulled out one of the bureau drawers and placed it sidewise on the seat of the chair. By clambering on top of this improvised ladder, he was just able to reach the transom.

Then he drew from his pocket a table knife which he had been thoughtful enough to filch and secrete the day previous. It wasn't much of a weapon, but it served very nicely for his purpose, which was to remove the putty which held the glass pane of the transom in place.

Working very cautiously so as not to make any unnecessary noise, he dug away all the putty and also removed some of the triangular bits of metal, glazier's tacks, which secured the glass, leaving just enough of them to prevent the pane from falling out.

Having assured himself that he could quickly remove the glass whenever he wished, he clambered down from his lofty perch and began to hunt for something he could use as a weapon.

His first idea was to sharpen the table knife which he had pilfered; but, after he had scraped it against the concrete window sill for half an hour without making any appreciable impression on the metal, he gave this up as impractical.

Then a glint caught his eye, directing his attention to one of the brass knobs which decorated his bed. He

found that he could unscrew it easily. In the bureau drawer there were several pairs of stockings. Gaynor removed one of them and dropped the bed knob into the toe of it. Swinging it around his head, he concluded that he had armed himself with a very satisfactory black-jack. By way of extra preparedness, he unscrewed the other three knobs, placing each of them inside a stocking and stuffing them into his pockets.

Phillip had scarcely completed these preparations when he heard a terrifying scream.

With the agility of a chipmunk he scampered up on the pile of furniture and peered anxiously through the transom. When he first looked he could see no one in the hallway, but presently a distant door opened and some people came through it. Gaynor recognized Doctor Maxim, Nichols and Miss Stone. The nurse was pushing a wheeled stretcher on which lay a sheet-covered, prostrate form. The woman on the stretcher was struggling violently and the two men seemed to be having a hard time trying to hold their captive. Her screams were partially quenched by something which the surgeon was holding over her mouth.

Gaynor couldn't see the victim's face, but he felt certain that it was Miss Goodwin.

His angry blood throbbing at his temples, Phillip watched this drama until the stretcher was wheeled through a swinging door, which he surmised led to the operating room.

The smothered screams rose to an ear-torturing shriek, then changed suddenly to a gurgling moan and finally ceased completely.

Presently the door swung open again and Doctor Maxim, accompanied by

Nichols, strode down the hall and disappeared.

Knowing that at least one of the men would soon return, Gaynor told himself that he would have to work quickly. It took only a few seconds to remove the glass from the transom. But when he looked through the opening he realized that it was a long hazardous drop for a small boy to make.

It wouldn't do to risk breaking a limb, or even wrenching an ankle.

Fetching a pillow from his bed, Gaynor stuffed it through the opening. With this to break his fall, he dropped into the hallway, alighting on the pillow without the slightest difficulty.

He tiptoed to the operating room and stealthily pushed open the swinging door. The mingled odors of ether, alcohol and iodine assailed his nostrils.

Miss Stone was bending over the operating table, on which an inert form lay.

CHAPTER VIII

The Fight at the Landing Field

GAYNOR had not formulated any definite plan of attack, but the smell of ether put an idea in his head. Taking meticulous care not to make any noise, he stole to the table and reached up for a can which was labeled "Sulphuric Ether." With a lancet which he found nearby, he punched a hole in the soft metal stopper. Then he located a large pad of gauze, which he saturated with the anesthetic.

The sickish-sweet fumes of the ether almost overpowered him, but, by holding his breath, he managed to retain his consciousness.

As the last of the ether left the can, it made a gurgling noise, which Miss Stone must have heard, for she looked

around. But before she had time to do or say anything, Gaynor was on her back. With his tiny legs, he desperately gripped her waist. He clamped the ether-soaked pad over her nose and mouth, holding it in place with both his small hands.

Miss Stone emitted a noise which sounded like the distant howl of a lonesome coyote. Then she began to clutch viciously at Gaynor's spindling arms. During her first angry attack she almost succeeded in dislodging him, but Phillip gritted his teeth and clung to the pad with all the strength his puny body could commandeer. Fortunately the ether began to take effect immediately, and the woman's frantic tugs at his hands became weaker and weaker.

Finally, with a muffled moan, her body relaxed and she slumped to the floor. Even then, Gaynor didn't dare to let go. His head thumped the floor with a noise which sounded to him like a pile-driver crashing into a concrete pavement, but still he held on.

When he felt sure that the nurse was unconscious, he released his hold and staggered to his feet. Knowing that the effects of the anaesthetic would soon wear off, Gaynor bound her hands and her feet together with adhesive tape.

Soon after he had completed this task, he heard a noise. It sounded like a child crying, and it seemed to come from the hallway. Gaynor had just time enough to crawl under the operating table, when the door opened and Doctor Maxim entered. He was carrying the little girl who had arrived with him in the airplane that morning.

When Maxim saw Miss Stone, he set the child down and bent over the prostrate body of the nurse.

Gaynor drew from his pocket one

of his bed-knob-stocking blackjacks, and, forsaking his hiding place, started to sneak up on Maxim. Just as he came within range, the surgeon stood up and turned around. Spying the boy, he roared, "So it's you, is it? I suppose you are the one that did this to Miss Stone."

Gaynor's only answer was to swing the blackjack around his head a revolution or two. When he had thus imparted a sufficient amount of momentum to it, he brought the weapon against Doctor Maxim's right shin.

Uttering a howl which sounded like the noise made by the Big Bad Wolf when he dropped into the kettle of turpentine, Maxim bent over and started to rub the injured member. This was a very unwise move on his part, for it put his bald shining pate within easy reach of Gaynor's formidable weapon. Down came the blackjack again, this time landing with a thudding smack on Maxim's unprotected skull. Over his rat-like features spread a silly, vapid expression, and he slumped to the floor, with his head pillowed on the ample thigh of his unconscious nurse.

The little girl had made no attempt to escape from the operating room. She just stood in a corner, whimpering and trembling. When Gaynor approached her she drew away from him, but he reassured her by saying, "Don't be afraid of me, little girl. Can't you see I'm a child like yourself?"

She stopped whining for a moment and nodded.

"All right then. You and I must stick together. I'm not going to let that bad man harm you. Maybe, if we're lucky, I'll get you back to your mother and your daddy. But you'll have to help me. What do you say, sister? Can I count on you?"

Again the little girl nodded assent. "O. K." Gaynor smiled. "My name is Phillip. What's yours?"

"It's Daisy." The girl told him. "Daisy Logan."

"All right, Daisy. Now give me a hand. Help me tie up this big, bad villain."

Together they trussed up Doctor Maxim, taking time enough to bind him so securely that it would be difficult for him to free himself without assistance.

Gaynor then turned his attention to Miss Goodwin. She was still unconscious. The two children wheeled the stretcher close to the operating table and rolled Miss Goodwin onto it. Then they trundled the stretcher along the hall until they reached the broad stairway.

"How are we going to get her down stairs?" Daisy wailed.

"We'll wheel it like a baby buggy," Gaynor told her. "I'll hold up the front end. You cling on to the back part and let it down the stairs as easily as you can."

THEY reached the patio without mishap. There was no one in sight to interfere with them, as they wheeled the stretcher in the direction of the Landing Field.

Flanking the hangar there was a large hibiscus bush, which offered ample cover for the stretcher.

"You stay here, Daisy," Phillip commanded. "Keep a close watch on the lady. If she wakes up, tell her everything is all right and that she must stay behind this bush and not make any noise."

Gaynor then walked boldly to the door of the hangar and entered. He was just about to climb into the cockpit of the monoplane when he heard a noise which sent icy tremors run-

ning up and down his spine. It sounded like the low, menacing snarl of some terrible wild beast. But after listening to it breathlessly for a few seconds, Gaynor decided that it was a human being snoring.

Guided by the raucous noise, he went to a small room at the rear of the hangar which was used as a combination of work-shop and sleeping chamber. Stretched out on the cot bed was a man whom Gaynor recognized as Johnson, Maxim's mechanic.

Shaking him roughly, Phillip yelled in his ear, "Wake up, Mr. Johnson! Doctor Maxim wants to use the monoplane!"

Sitting up with a grunt and rubbing his eyes drowsily, Johnson muttered, "What did you say?"

"Doctor Maxim wants to use the plane!" yelled Phillip in his boyish treble. "He told me to ask you to wheel the monoplane out on the runway and to warm up the engine."

Johnson grabbed the boy by the shoulders and growled, "See here, punk! You're not trying to kid me, are you?"

"Course not," was Phillip's vehement denial. "You'd better snap into it. Doctor Maxim is in an awful hurry. He'll be mad as the dickens if you don't get that plane ready pronto."

"Well, maybe I'd better do what you say," Johnson yawned. "I guess it must be on the level. You're too dumb to invent orders like that yourself."

"Sure I am," Gaynor agreed. "I just repeated what Doctor Maxim told me to tell you."

"O.K., Buddy," and Johnson opened the wide doors and started to trundle the plane out of the hangar. Setting the brakes and blocking the wheels, he started the motor.

It had been running for less than a minute, when two men burst out of

the house, yelling and gesticulating wildly. The engine was making too much noise for Johnson to hear them, so he shut off the ignition switch and climbed out of the cockpit.

"What are they yelling about?" Johnson asked Phillip.

Doing some fast thinking, Gaynor started to yell and jump up and down. Pointing to the hangar, he shouted, "Look! There's a fire back in the locker room. That's what they are hollering about! They must have seen the smoke!" Taking his cue from this last word, Johnson ejaculated, "Holy smoke," and scrambled out of the cockpit. With Phillip at his heels, he barged into the locker room. Gazing around with a puzzled look on his face he stammered, "Why, there ain't no fire in here. What are you—"

Just then Phillip slammed the door in his face. Before Johnson realized what was happening he heard the padlock click and knew that he was a prisoner.

CHAPTER IX

A Perilous Flight

WHEN Gaynor turned around, Hawkins and Nichols were just entering the hangar.

"What are you doing here?" Hawkins wanted to know.

Nichols demanded, "Where's Johnson?"

Gaynor couldn't think of an intelligent answer. Remembering the familiar aphorism that "silence is the best substitute for intelligence," he said nothing.

It transpired that answers to these questions were really not needed for they were answered by a thundering clamor on the door of the locker room. From within, Johnson was roaring

angrily. "Let me out! Let me out!"

"So that's it!" Nichols snarled. "You've locked Johnson up in that room. What's the idea, anyway?" and he started toward the door.

Placing himself between the servant and the locker room, Phillip brandished one of his bed-knob-stocking blackjack and commanded, "Stop! Don't you dare to come a step further."

This act was so surprising that Nichols actually did stop.

Hawkins laughed sneeringly, "What's the matter Nichols? You aren't afraid of the kid are you?"

"Who me?" Nichols leered. "Me afraid of the little squirt? Course not," and he started toward the door.

Winding up like a baseball pitcher, Gaynor hurled his weapon at the approaching man. It struck him in his abdomen, just below his diaphragm. With a piggish grunt, Nichols folded himself up like a jackknife and lay down on the floor of the hangar.

By the time Hawkins had recovered his astonishment sufficiently to join in the fray, Gaynor had jerked a second black-jack out of his pocket. He hurled it at the butler's head, but Hawkins saw it coming and dodged just in time.

With an angry oath, he picked Gaynor up in his arms and started to carry him outside. This turned out to be a strategical error on the part of Hawkins, for it put the most vulnerable portion of his anatomy, namely his head, directly in range of Gaynor's third black-jack.

Drawing his next-to-the-last reserve weapon from his pocket, Gaynor brought it down on Hawkin's head with a crack that sounded like Babe Ruth knocking out a three-bagger.

The butler's knees crumpled and he sank limply to the ground.

Disentangling himself from the wreckage, Gaynor ran to the hibiscus bush where he had left Daisy and Thelda.

Miss Goodwin was sitting up on the stretcher, gazing about her in a bewildered sort of way.

"What happened?" she stammered. "How—how—did I get out here?"

"We brought you out here," Gaynor told her, "Daisy and I. I told you I was going to rescue you. So far everything has gone swell. Now if you will only give us your co-operation."

"Co-operation?" Thelda said in a voice that quivered with alarm. "What are you going to do."

"I'm going to get you away from this island—right now!" Gaynor declared.

"But how?" was Thelda's doubting response. "I don't see how—"

"We're going in the airplane," he told her. "See! It's out on the runway—already for us to take off. But we'd better hurry. Maxim may be here any minute. Or Johnson may get out. Hawkins or Nichols may come too. So let's be on our way."

"What on earth are you talking about?" Miss Goodwin demanded. "What good will the airplane do us when there's no one to pilot it for us?"

"I'm going to pilot it!" Gaynor informed her.

"What?"

"I said that I am going to pilot the plane."

"See here, Phillip," Miss Goodwin said sternly. "Please don't joke. This is a serious matter."

"I'm not joking," Gaynor assured her. "I can't blame you for thinking so, however. Naturally it's hard for you to believe that I know how to man-age a plane. But don't worry. I'm a licensed pilot. I have over six hundred flying hours to my credit."

"Ridiculous!" she exclaimed. "You are altogether too young to be a licensed pilot, even if you—"

"Oh, I see what you are thinking about," Gaynor grinned. "You think I am just an infant. My body is that of a child, sure enough, but I have the brain of a full grown man."

"Surely," Miss Goodwin told him, "you can't expect me to believe that fairy tale."

"In a voice which rang with deadly seriousness despite its youthful timbre, Phillip declared, "Miss Goodwin, you MUST believe me! Can't you see that your safety depends on it?"

He took her hand and dragged her toward the plane.

"But my clothes!" she gasped. "I can't go for an airplane ride in my nightgown."

"What difference does that make! Here! Wrap this sheet around you," he said. "And for heaven's sake, hurry. You come along too, Daisy."

Concluding that there was no harm in humoring his whim, Miss Goodwin obeyed.

Gaynor boosted Daisy into the forward cockpit of the plane.

"Come on," he said to Miss Goodwin. "You get into the rear cockpit." She hesitated.

"Hurry, please!"

"But Phillip! Are you sure—"

"If you don't think I know how to run this plane, watch me. If I can get the motor started, will that convince you?"

"I guess so."

"O.K. Here goes!"

A moment later, the engine began to utter a deafening roar and the draft from the propeller whipped the sheet around Miss Goodwin's ankles.

Gaynor leaned over the edge of the cockpit and yelled, "Come on! Please hurry."

SHE couldn't hear the words but she had no difficulty in interpreting the gestures which accompanied them. With one last look at Maxim's palatial villa, she clambered into the cockpit beside Gaynor.

Into her ear Phillip yelled, "I'm afraid I'll have to sit on your lap. My legs are not long enough to reach the rudder, so you'll have to do the steering."

"You mean you want me to run this airplane?" she said in a trembly voice. "Let me out of here!"

She started to get up, but Gaynor clutched at her hand and held on tenaciously.

"Please trust me," he implored. "We can manage all right. All you have to do is follow my instructions. I'll handle the joystick and the rest of the gimmicks."

He advanced the throttle and the drumming of the motor became intensified. After allowing the minimum time for the motor to warm up, he slowly released the brakes. The plane gave a short lurch but refused to move any further.

"Oh I know what's the matter," Phillip exclaimed. "I forgot to remove the chocks."

Setting the brakes again, he stood up on the seat and began to crawl out of the cockpit, Miss Goodwin also rose.

"You stay here!" he shouted in her ear. "I'll be right back."

It was no easy task for him to dislodge the two wooden blocks which were tightly wedged against the indented tires of the landing wheels, but by dint of super-childish efforts, Phillip managed to accomplish the job. As he was clambering back into the plane he took a rapid glance over one shoulder in the direction of the house. He was horrified to see a man come running out on the patio. Even at a

distance, Gaynor had no difficulty in recognizing the rat-like head of Doctor Maxim. In his hand was a wicked-looking rifle. He was running toward the airplane with a speed which was astonishing for one as old and corpulent as he.

Fear gave an extra impetus to Gaynor's tiny legs and arms as he scampered up the side of the plane and plumped down into Miss Goodwin's lap. A few seconds later, with the throttle wide open, the plane was whizzing down the runway.

When the ship began to move, Doctor Maxim stopped running and brought the rifle to his shoulder. Knowing that the monoplane would have to come within a few feet of the place where he was standing, he took careful aim before pulling the trigger.

"Quick!" Gaynor yelled in Miss Goodwin's ear. "Push down on your right foot, but not too much!"

She obeyed and the plane swerved giddily, heading straight for Doctor Maxim.

Seeing the thundering machine bearing down on him, Maxim became panic stricken. He dropped the rifle and bolted for cover.

"O.K. That was swell," Gaynor shouted. "Now push a bit on your left foot so as to straighten her out and head her down the runway."

Miss Goodwin did her best with the unfamiliar mechanism. Before she had realized that they had left the ground, she leaned over the side of the plane and saw the shoreline of Juvenescence Island, several hundred feet below her.

Gaynor climbed to the altitude of about two thousand feet. Then he leveled off and made a careful scrutiny of the landscape below him. It didn't take him long to come to the conclusion that Juvenescence Island was off

the coast of Mexico, about three hundred miles from the United States border.

A few hours later, Gaynor set the plane down, at Lindbergh Field, San Diego. It wasn't what the popular air fictionist would call a "perfect, three-point landing." The best that can be said is that he didn't wreck the plane and that none of his passengers was seriously injured. Considering the circumstances, the boy pilot with the adult brain regarded it as a very happy landing.

Fortunately they arrived at a time when there were not many people at the airport. As it was, Miss Goodwin's ghostly, bed-linen apparel seemed to inspire an inordinate amount of curiosity.

Although he didn't have a nickel in his pocket, Gaynor hailed a taxi-cab and bundled his two companions into it.

"Where to?" the driver inquired.

Gaynor looked inquiringly at Thelda.

"What do you say, Miss Goodwin? Don't you think we'd better restore Daisy to her parents first?"

Thelda agreed to this and Gaynor said, "Tell the driver where you live, Daisy."

CHAPTER X

Reunions—Happy and Otherwise

WHEN Mrs. Logan answered her doorbell and her tear-drenched, swollen eyes fell on her only child, whom she had given up as lost, she fell to her knees with her arms around her darling and fervently murmured, "Thank God."

Several minutes elapsed before she could compose herself sufficiently to break the glad tidings to her husband who owned a small barber shop a short

distance away. Leaving a customer with his face half shaved, Mr Logan rushed home. Then followed another reunion, fraught with tears and smiles and prayers of thanksgiving.

Neither of Daisy's parents paid much attention to Phillip or Thelda. Finally Gaynor said, "Excuse me, Mrs. Logan, I wonder if you could do us a couple of favors."

"Why of course!" she exclaimed. "How thoughtless of me. What can I do for you?"

"Well you see, we had to leave the Island rather hurriedly. Miss Goodwin was on the operating table and naturally she didn't have much clothes on. You seem to be about the same size as Miss Goodwin. Would you mind lending her some of your clothes? She'll send them back to you, of course."

"I'd be delighted to do that," Mrs. Logan replied. "Come with me, Miss Goodwin. My wardrobe isn't exactly luxurious, but you're welcome to anything I have."

When the two women had departed, Mr. Logan said, "Well my boy, isn't there something I can do for you to show my appreciation?"

"There sure is," was Gaynor's enthusiastic response. "You see we had to take off in a rush and in the excitement, I left my wallet on the grand piano. I'm completely strapped."

"And you want me to take care of the taxi fare. I shall be delighted."

Mr. Logan started toward the front door, but Gaynor stopped him with "Excuse me, Mr. Logan, but I have a couple of errands to do, and I'll need that taxicab."

"Oh I understand," Mr. Logan said. "You need money."

He took out his wallet, thumbed over its contents and extracted two ten dollar bills.

"Will twenty dollars be enough?" he asked.

"Ten will be plenty," Gaynor told him. "I'll repay you as soon as I get a job."

"You get a job?" Logan laughed. "I'm afraid that will be a long time, my boy. But never mind. Keep the ten-spot. I wish I could afford to pay you a thousand times as much as that. You certainly have earned it, my lad."

When Thelda returned, arrayed in one of Mrs. Logan's dresses, Gaynor said, "Well, come on, Miss Goodwin. We still have a lot to do to-day. Let's be on our way."

"No need to rush off," Mrs. Logan said tritely.

Mr. Logan asked, "Before you leave, wouldn't you like to use our 'phone. No doubt you will want to let your relatives know you are back."

"I have no relatives out here," Miss Goodwin told him. "My Mother and Father are both dead and I never had any brothers or sisters."

"I'm awfully sorry," Mr. Logan said. "But surely there must be someone."

"I suppose I ought to notify my landlady," Miss Goodwin admitted. "She may be worrying about my absence. But I don't want to impose on your generosity. You see my home is in Santa Ana."

"Don't worry about that," Logan laughed. "The toll charge to Santa Ana isn't much and you've done so much for us that we owe you a great deal more than we possibly can repay."

Facing Jackie Washburn's parents was a gruelling ordeal for Phillip Gaynor. After he had received their avid hugs and their barrage of warm, tearful kisses—after he had seen their grief-furrowed faces transformed in-

to expressions of beaming rapture—he found it extremely difficult to tell them that he really was not their beloved son.

Finally, however, he managed to overcome his soft-heartedness sufficiently to tell them the truth.

They didn't believe him.

"You have changed a great deal, Jackie," Mrs. Washburn told him. "You talk like—well, I've never heard you use such big words before. And your eyes—they seem so strange to me."

"That can easily be explained," Mr. Washburn cut in. "The boy has been through some horrible experiences. Naturally it has aged him. It's a wonder his hair hasn't turned grey!"

"How utterly preposterous!" Gaynor exclaimed. "Jackie has been away from home for only a few weeks. In that time he could hardly have acquired the sophisticated, intellectual vocabulary of an educated adult."

"But your story sounds so impossible—" Washburn started to say.

Gaynor interrupted with, "perhaps Miss Goodwin can convince you. She doubted my story too the first time she heard it. Maybe she still doubts it. I haven't asked her lately. But she knows some things about Doctor Maxim now that she didn't know before. What do you say, Miss Goodwin? Am I lying or am I telling the truth?"

"First let me ask Mr. Washburn a question," Thelda said.

"What is it?"

"Does Jackie know anything about airplanes?"

"No more than any other boy of five," Washburn replied. "He has never been aboard a plane, if that's what you mean. The only ones he has seen are those which fly over our back yard from time to time."

"Then, of course, Jackie doesn't

know how to start a motor or to pilot an airplane."

"Why, certainly not! How utterly ridiculous!" Jackie's mother interposed.

"Then what would you say if I told you that this youngster, who you think is your five-year-old child, actually started an engine without any assistance, hopped off in an airplane, flew it for several hundred miles and landed it without mishap?"

"What's that?" Washburn asked in a bewildered voice.

Thelda repeated her question, adding to it, "What would you think of that?"

Washburn replied, "I would think that you were trying to kid me or that you were suffering from hallucinations."

"I'm not trying to kid you and my mind is functioning perfectly," Thelda smiled. "What I have just told you actually happened. I don't blame you for doubting. I also was skeptical when Mr. Gaynor first told his fantastic story to me. It seemed so preposterous that I didn't even consider the possibility that it might be true. But the way he handled that airplane convinced me. I am certain that neither Jackie Washburn, nor any other child of his age, could possibly have done what he did."

"Thanks," Gaynor cut in. "And now that Mr. and Mrs. Washburn are convinced that what they see before them is only their son's body and that his brain is somewhere else, suppose we try to figure out some way to get his brain back where it belongs. Much as I have become attached to Jackie's beautiful little body, I naturally feel more at home in the one I have inhabited for nearly thirty years. What do you think we'd better do about it Mr. Washburn?"

"I don't know," Washburn stammered. "What—what would you suggest?"

"The first thing to do, in my opinion, is to get in touch with the District Attorney. Through him we can obtain police assistance which we will undoubtedly need. Perhaps it will be necessary to secure the co-operation of the Mexican authorities, since Juvenescence Island is probably Mexican territory. We'll also need the best surgeon in San Diego and a couple of nurses. What do you say? Shall I make all the arrangements?"

With his mouth open, Washburn stared at this astonishing boy who looked like his five-year old son and stammered, "I—I—guess you'd better."

CHAPTER XI

Back to Juvenescence Island

SHORTLY after noon on the following day two airplanes swooped down upon Juvenescence Island. One of them was Doctor Maxim's monoplane, the other was a large transport plane with room for a dozen passengers. The larger craft landed first. In addition to the two pilots, its occupants included five detectives, one of whom wore the uniform of a San Diego police captain, a famous surgeon, two nurses, Mr. Washburn and Phillip Gaynor.

A few seconds later, Maxim's monoplane alighted. From the forward cockpit clambered two men whose garb proclaimed them to be Mexican policemen. Equipped with sub-machine guns, sawed-off shotguns and gas guns, the seven police officers were prepared for battle. Fortunately they were not required to use their weapons.

When Doctor Maxim saw this for-

midable array of well-armed, resolute men, he dropped his rifle and submitted to arrest. Hawkins, Nichols, Johnson and Miss Stone followed their leader's sensible example and surrendered without a struggle.

Leaving the handcuffed prisoners in charge of the two Mexican police officers, the five American detectives, guided by Gaynor, made a thorough search of the main building.

Locked in one of the bedrooms, they found the person who looked like a full grown man and behaved like a small boy.

"There's your son, Mr. Washburn," Gaynor whispered. "The body he's using now, belongs to me, however."

Evidently fighting against the unbelief which common sense put in his mind, Washburn spoke the one word, "Jackie!"

The man looked up from the toy locomotive he was playing with. When he spied Washburn, he leaped to his feet and ran to him with outstretched arms.

"Daddy!" he cried. "Oh, Daddy, I'm so glad you've come for me!"

Searching further, the detectives located Doctor Hughes. He was in the laboratory, peering intently into the barrel of a powerful microscope.

The police captain put his hand on the doctor's shoulder and said, "You are under arrest."

One of the other detectives was about to slip a pair of handcuffs on the prisoner, but Gaynor interceded with, "Please don't do that. I don't think Doctor Hughes has done anything criminal. It is my belief that Doctor Maxim obtained his assistance without letting him know that he had kidnapped his victims and that he was operating on them without their consent. Isn't that so, Doctor Hughes?"

The surgeon seemed to be genuine-

ly surprised. After the situation was explained to him in detail he emphatically denied that he had participated in the conspiracy.

When he had finished, the police captain said, "That all sounds plausible enough, but it isn't my job to decide whether you're innocent or guilty. If you weren't in on this, you'll have an opportunity to clear yourself at the preliminary hearing."

"Just a moment," Gaynor interposed. "The easiest way for Doctor Hughes to prove his innocence is to help set things right again. And he's probably the only man on earth who is qualified to do this."

"What do you mean?" the officer asked.

"Just this," Gaynor answered. "The operations which Doctor Maxim performed on Jackie Washburn and on me were very unusual ones. It was necessary to use special equipment which no one else knows anything about. No other surgeon has ever succeeded in performing an operation like this, which involves interchanging two human brains. Furthermore it would be extremely dangerous, if not positively fatal for any other surgeon to attempt such an operation without the special equipment and the unique technique which Doctor Maxim has developed. Isn't it true, Doctor Hughes?"

"Absolutely!" the physician agreed. "So far as I know, Doctor Maxim is the only person in the world who is qualified to perform such an operation. If any other surgeon attempted the task, it would most certainly result in the death of both patients."

"But how about yourself?" Gaynor asked.

"What do you mean?"

"What I have in mind is this," Gaynor told him. "So far as Doctor Max-

im is concerned, he's out of the picture. I wouldn't trust my life in his hands and I'm sure that Mr. Washburn would not allow him to operate on Jackie. But there is one person in whom I would have confidence, and that is you Doctor Hughes."

"What makes you think that I could do it?" Hughes said quietly.

"In the first place, Doctor Maxim wouldn't have selected you to assist him if he hadn't been convinced of your exceptional surgical skill. Furthermore, I happen to know that Doctor Maxim explained his four dimensional apparatus to you."

"How did you learn that?" Hughes said in surprise.

"I overheard several conversations between you and Doctor Maxim. Though I can't be certain of anything that happened while I was unconscious, I have reason to believe that you were present when Doctor Maxim operated on Jackie and me. Isn't that true?"

"Yes," Hughes admitted.

"Well, then," Gaynor continued. "If you witnessed the operations and if you understand the equipment and the technique which Doctor Maxim used, what's to prevent you from restoring my brain to my own body and Jackie's to his?"

"You expect me to do this alone?" Hughes asked.

"Not at all. We brought a famous surgeon with us. His name is Doctor Sherman. No doubt you've heard of him."

"Yes, of course," said the physician. "Doctor Sherman is one of the best brain surgeons in the profession."

"Then it's all decided," Gaynor declared. "Would you advise going to a hospital in California, or performing the operations here?"

"Here, by all means," Hughes insisted. "We couldn't do anything without the four dimensional apparatus. It is rather heavy—altogether too cumbersome to transport in an airplane. I see no advantages in performing the operations elsewhere. Right here on this island we have everything that is needed in the way of facilities and equipment. Perhaps a trained nurse or two—"

"We brought a couple with us," Gaynor interrupted. "When do we start the operations?"

CHAPTER XII

Restorations and Recompenses

THANKS to Doctor Maxim's wonderful inventions and to the combined skill of Doctor Hughes and Doctor Sherman, the operations which were subsequently performed on Phillip Gaynor and Jackie Washburn were eminently successful.

With his own brain restored to his own body, Gaynor lay on the bed where he had spent his first night as Doctor Maxim's guest. Despite the dull pains which still throbbed in his aching head, Phillip was happy—blissfully happy. His felicity could easily be understood, for beside his bed was seated an incomparably lovely girl.

"Doctor Hughes said you might talk for a little while today," Thelda was telling him. As a sort of afterthought, she added, "That is, if you feel like talking to me."

"Of course I do," he murmured in a voice which was a bit uncertain, but none the less enthusiastic. "There are so many things I want to tell you."

"Yes?" she prompted him.

"Do you recall the first time we met?"

"You mean when you were a little boy?"

"Yes—or rather when you *thought* I was a little boy. Remember what you did then?"

"Of course I remember. I picked you up in my arms and kissed you."

"And then?"

Thelda laughed. To Gaynor it sounded like heavenly music.

"As I remember the incident, I held you in my lap and I told you I thought you were awfully sweet."

"But of course you didn't mean it," Phillip said.

"Certainly I meant it. I'm not in the habit of saying things I don't mean."

"But what I mean is—oh I don't know how to express it—you—I mean those—affectionate words—they were spoken to little Jackie Washburn. They weren't intended for Phillip Gaynor—of course they weren't."

"Perhaps you wouldn't want me to say things like that to Phillip Gaynor," she countered.

"Why, er—"

He started to stammer a response, but she interrupted him with, "And by the way, young man, maybe you have forgotten, but you made some rather flattering remarks that day. Do you remember?"

Gaynor nodded. "I probably told you that I—"

Again she cut in, "Let me see if I can recall your exact words. They were awfully big words for such a little fellow to use correctly. One of them, I believe, was 'pulchritudinous'."

"Yes," said Phillip. "I said that you are the most pulchritudinous lady I have ever had the good fortune to observe."

"But that of course was Jackie Washburn talking."

"Draw your own conclusions. I'll

tell you this much though. After Phillip Gaynor became well acquainted with Thelda Goodwin, he not only regarded her as the loveliest girl in the world but also the most gracious, the most charming, the most virtuous—in fact the most desirable lady in existence."

"My gracious!" Thelda exclaimed. "Do you expect me to swallow that in one gulp?"

Gaynor didn't answer. Into his eyes came an inscrutable expression which puzzled and alarmed Thelda.

After several minutes of embarrassing silence, Thelda said, "Well, Phillip, for a man who claimed he had a lot to tell me, you seem to have run out of ammunition rather quickly."

"I just happened to think of something," he blurted out.

"What is it, Phillip?" she said solicitously. "Please tell me."

"You must forget what I said, Thelda," Gaynor rejoined. "I shouldn't have spoken as I did."

"Then you were just joking? You really didn't mean—"

"Of course I did mean them—every word and a lot more. But I just happened to remember that I'm nothing but a penniless bum. I'm down and out and busted. I haven't even got a job."

"But suppose you had money?" she said eagerly. "I mean a lot of money—say ten thousand dollars. What would you say to me then?"

"What's the use of supposing anything so impossible as that?" he said dolefully.

"Well—impossible or not—let's suppose that you had ten thousand dollars. What would you say to me then?"

"If I had only one-tenth that amount—just enough to get started on—I'd say plenty," he declared.

"And just what would you say, Phillip dear," she coaxed him.

"First I'd tell you that I love you—that I'm plumb crazy about you."

"Yes, and then?"

"Then I'd ask you if you'd marry me."

"And suppose I said 'Yes'—what then?"

"Then I'd ask you to kiss me—you see I'm a bit weak to go after—"

The end of his sentence was smothered as she crushed her warm lips against his.

"And now," she panted, "I want to show you something."

Pulling out the drawer in the table beside his bed, she removed an envelope and handed it to him.

"What's this?" he asked.

"Open it and see for yourself," she suggested.

"Do you know what's in the envelope?"

She colored and confessed, "Yes, I do. You see the flap wasn't sealed very well—in fact it was practically wide open. I had an idea what it was. Being somewhat interested in you—that is in your welfare I mean—well, the fact of the matter is—I peeked."

"That's O.K., dear. I suppose you'll be opening my mail regularly after

we're married, so you may as well start now. Tell me what did you find?"

"Phillip Gaynor!" she cried in an exasperated tone. "Will you *please* open that envelope?"

Slowly and deliberately, Gaynor obeyed. From the envelope he drew forth a letter and a cashier's check on a well-known Los Angeles Bank. The note was very brief, all it said was: "Dear Gaynor: I always keep my promises. Maxim."

Phillip could hardly believe his eyes when he read the figures on the check.

"Phew!" he ejaculated. "Ten thousand bucks! I didn't think there was that much left over from the late lamented crash."

"Do you think it will be enough, darling?" Thelda asked demurely.

"It ought to be sufficient to finance a trip to Niagara Falls," he jested. "And after that—"

"And after that?" she echoed.

"Let's hope there will be enough of a balance to last us until the depression is over!"

"Amen!" said Thelda with enthusiasm, as she bent over and imprinted another fervent kiss on her lover's avid lips.

THE END



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When the Meteor Struck

By J. LEWIS BURTT, B. Sc.

We have here quite a delightful presentation of cosmic or rather of universe happenings. It includes comments on mankind and criticisms of our race by superior beings of the universe, and disapproval of mankind's foolish ways, so sadly emphasized by war and despotic governmental methods.

ELZAR the Archivist, by Radiant Transmission from the Fourth Planet of the Star called "The King's Eye." Year of Emancipation 27,162.

To the Supreme Ruler of Tarlatt, Planet Two of the star Anchis.

This, Exalted and Honoured One, is the full and true report of the loosing of the sub-satellite Nor and of the sequence thereof.

Your Highness will rejoice to know that the dire consequences, which, as mentioned in our previous report, we feared must follow the unforeseen collision between the escaped Nor and the third planet of "The King's Eye," have not developed, but have been averted by the wisdom and intelligence given to the Prince Kestran, your honoured nephew and our respected commander, at whose directions we ray this report.

When the changes in the orbit of the little world Nor made it imperative that we release it from its primary and set it loose to wander in space, we little dreamed that it would do other than take up for itself a new orbit around our own world, or that it would at least remain a member of our own planetary system.

And even when it was seen that the little wanderer was setting forth into the depths of outer space, we gave no thought to the possibility of its eventually striking some remote and

unknown world. The interest of curiosity alone, or so it seemed, caused your noble nephew to follow its journeyings through the unfathomable void.

Curiosity alone, did I say? Yet methinks the curiosity of the noble prince must have been inspired in him by the Supreme Wisdom.

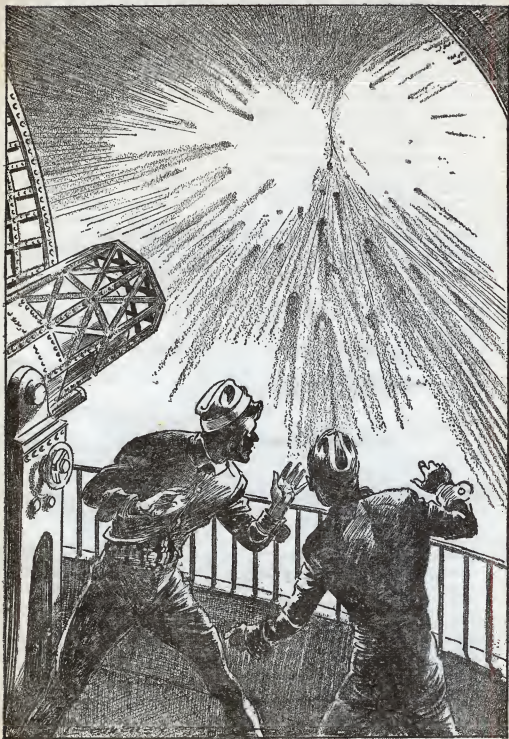
For the space of nearly a sixty-year cycle we followed the wanderer. Then, tiring, as a young man must needs do, of such an amusement, the noble prince gave instruction to return home. But scarcely had we begun to swing around on our homeward course than it was discovered that Nor was being attracted towards the yellow star we call "The King's Eye," from whose system we now report.

When the information reached the prince, he at once had the space-yacht headed for this beautiful star, whose sphere of influence we reached some ten years in advance of Nor's arrival.

To our intense surprise and delight, we discovered that this star is the parent of a large family of planets and satellites, a condition which appears to be more common than some of our astronomers would have us believe.

Roughly the system is as follows:—
The star* itself is, as with our own

*The Sun is far larger than Jupiter, the largest of the planets.



*A flash of blinding light—a tearing, rolling crash, like some incredible thunder peal—
little Nor was dead.*

star, enormously greater than any of its family, yet, even so, some of its planets far exceed our own world in size. Of major planets the system has eight in addition to numerous satellites and a system of some two thousand planetoids which appear to be the remains of a ninth planet wrecked by some long-forgotten cataclysm.

These planetoids divide the main system into two parts, four massive outer planets, the largest of which have a diameter fully twenty times that of our own Marlatt, and some of which have numerous satellites and sub-satellites.

None of these worlds appear to be inhabited by any intelligent forms of life, though primitive forms were found on some of the larger satellites.

The four inner planets proved to be by far the most interesting. The innermost, being close to its primary sun, is not yet habitable, though it seems obvious that it will eventually become so as its primary sun cools.*

The second is decidedly habitable for many forms of life, but it has not yet developed far. Vegetation is rank and prolific, but animal and intellectual forms are yet in their infancy. It has a dense mantle of clouds.

The third planet,** which is accompanied by a disproportionately large satellite, is more progressive. Its animal forms, some beautiful others grotesque, are well developed, while its intellectuals are just emerging out of the primitive stages.

They have already learned to build cities, they are able to communicate with some slight measure of speed and efficiency even over considerable distances, and they have some knowl-

edge of natural forces and of mechanical devices. Their higher natures, on the other hand, are less developed. They have a crude sort of social order and government, but it is a most inefficient one and one subject to violent disturbances and readjustments from time to time.

During the most recent cycles they have begun to gain some faint conception of the Supreme Wisdom, and therefore we conclude that they must eventually attain to full development. It was for this reason that the prince decided to go to their assistance in the manner we shall describe later.

We were not able to make ourselves known to them, since their intellects are not yet sufficiently developed, nor to tell the truth, could we bring ourselves to the point of mingling with these (to us) hideous, long-limbed, clumsy bipeds. (No doubt they would have considered us equally hideous had they seen us). There was also the additional reason that the atmosphere of this world is highly impregnated with the element oxygen, which would, of course, be fatal to us, though it appears to be necessary to their forms of life.

The fourth planet,* one nearly the size of our own world, and accompanied by two satellites even smaller than Nor, we found to be the most advanced in the system, though, like its neighbors, very far behind ourselves.

Perhaps this backwardness is due to the exceedingly short life-span of these creatures—a mere forty or fifty of our years—or it may be that this short life-cycle is not so much a cause as a result of their uncouth and barbarous social systems. That we cannot answer.

*Mercury is alluded to whose temperature is very high on account of the proximity of the Sun.

**The Earth.

*Mars—supposed to depend largely on the melting of its ice caps for water.

This fourth planet has suffered for generations from a lack of water, so much so that its creatures have been gradually decreasing in both numbers and culture for a long time—the terrible and desperate wars fought for the possession of the diminishing water supplies naturally accentuating and accelerating this decline.

This spirit of quarrelsomeness seems characteristic of this system in its present stage of development. The people of Planet Four have, of course, some excuse in their desperate need for water, but we have puzzled long and vainly to account for this condition among the creatures of Planet Three, which is one of the most desirable and productive worlds imaginable. As we say, we cannot account for this miasmatic spirit which pervades the system, though we do notice some indications that its destructive power is lessening and that within a few generations a true civilization will develop among them.

But, Honoured One, this is not a report on the conditions prevailing in this system. That is being dealt with in a separate report to be delivered on our return to Marlatt.

AS the errant Nor approached, we began to fear that it might be deflected from its path in such a way as to strike one of the numerous worlds of this system, a calamity which must cause our kindly world eternal regret. Yet what could we do? We had no powerful force—machines other than our little driving motors. We had no very large gravitors, and, even if we had had them, our mass was so small in comparison with that of Nor that no influence we could exert would have any very appre-

ciable effect. However, we could watch, and perhaps warn.

As Nor approached the confines of the other system,* our astronomers discovered that the disturbances caused by its passage close to two of the larger planets would so alter its course as to cause it to come within the gravitational influence of the third planet, which planet it must inevitably strike fully and fairly.

What could we do? We of Tarlatt had been responsible for the loosing of Nor. Were we not equally responsible for the results of that act? Certainly we were, but—what *could* we do?

By this time we could sense the excitement and consternation that was beginning to disturb the always-unstable mentalities of Planet Three, whose observers had already noted the presence of Nor and realized their danger.

Now, too, our noble prince discovered that the minds of the most advanced of these beings could be made to understand ideas sent out by us for their reception, though the race as a whole seemed strangely reluctant to act on any such advice.

So we worked, worked as never before in our lives, to convey to them ideas which, if acted on at once, would give them at least some measure of protection from the results of the crash. And, to our joy, they did act on them to some extent. They did evacuate their seaboard settlements, did prepare themselves undersurface caverns in which they might be safe from the blasts of heat that must result from the collision should their world prove firm enough to resist actual disintegration at the moment of impact.

*The Solar system of sun, planets and satellites.

THEN we saw our chance. One of the engineer-controllers, who, with us all, had been working and calculating out possible and impossible suggestions, proposed that we range our ship close alongside Nor and, by using every possible repellant and reactional force we possessed, try to swing the little globe an infinitesimal amount from its course, hoping that such disturbance might produce sufficient deflection to effect a glancing blow instead of the head-on crash that now appeared threatening.

The attempt proved successful. Within a short time it became evident that Nor could be deflected sufficiently to pass the planet at a distance of about one-tenth diameter (of the third planet), unless the gravitational pull between them should prove sufficient to force Nor into an approaching spiral.

Eagerly we watched both the little wanderer and the great planet, watched also the reactions of the planet dwellers, whose puzzlement at the deflection, inexplicable to them, was amusing; perhaps they were not so far wrong after all, when they attributed it to the direct intervention of the Supreme Wisdom.

Then, almost at the last moment, when it was far too late to correct it, we saw our mistake. The planet's great satellite,* a body more than half the size of Tarlatt, calmly rolling along its slow orbit was found to be swinging from behind its primary right into the path of Nor.

Why had we not foreseen this? None of us could say just how the error had occurred. None could say just why he had not pushed Nor from the opposite side and so caused it to pass the planet on the side remote from this moon. But now the mischief

was done. Just what would result we were not all able to decide, but we did realize with thankfulness that the world about to be struck was a frozen, uninhabitable sphere of desolation to which little harm could possibly come—unless, by some chance, the impact should disrupt it completely, a calamity that might be disastrous to the parent planet.

Anxiously we continued to watch. Steadily the little Nor rushed towards the slow-moving moon as it is called. We could see the terrific storms, the disturbances on the planet, as even this small body swung so close past it. For a few tense moments it even seemed that Nor was, after all, to be captured by the big world. But no—for the little globe swerved, hesitated—and then passed on almost as though reluctant to face her impending doom.

Moment by moment we watched. Steadily the tiny world rushed forward to its end, now a matter of short minutes only. Then, like a runner sprinting for the goal, Nor seemed to spring forward and to hurl herself straight to her destruction against the moon.

Instinctively we braced ourselves for the shock, waited almost in agony for that supreme moment.

A blaze of blinding light—a tearing, rolling crash like some incredible thunder peal—little Nor was dead!

The tension snapped. Dazedly we stared at one another. And then slowly we realized what the imagination of mental tension *can* do.

Truly Nor was gone. Truly we had seen that magnificent outburst of light. But the sound—

Thousands of miles away across the emptiness of space had that crash occurred. No sound, however violent, could by any possibility have reached

*The Moon.

us. Yet we *heard* it; every one of us *heard* it, heard it even as though we had been in the very midst of the cataclysm itself.

FOR some time we could get no satisfactory observations. The surface of the satellite had been heated to incandescence at least in the vicinity of the impact. All we could tell was that there had been no actual disruption of the globe. Then, as the heat distributed itself throughout the mass of the satellite, we were enabled to see the results of the crash.

Over a huge area the substance of the moon had been fused into a sea of molten, incandescent lava, a sea which slowly cooled into a glazing expanse of iridescent beauty.

The rest of the moon's surface had been cracked and rent like a ball of shattered glass. Volcanic action was rife throughout all parts of the globe, volcanic action that surprised the inhabitants of the parent planet not a little, for they had long thought that their moon was frozen to its very core.

DAYS and months passed. The disturbances subsided and the tortured world settled down again to a peaceful existence. Peaceful by comparison only, of course, for in contrast to its former frozen sleep its new life was anything but peaceful.

Now the frozen sphere had become a warm, glowing ball, not hot enough to be actually luminous, yet hot enough to radiate a very appreciable amount of heat, apart altogether from the heat released through the hundreds of volcanic orifices that continued active.

Otherwise the moon pursued its old course little the worse for its experience. Its orbital speed was practically

unchanged and its rotation, which formerly synchronized with its revolution, only slightly accelerated. Yet now the inhabitants of Planet Three could at last see the age-long hidden "other side of the moon."

IT was on Planet Three itself, however, that the most serious consequences were felt. At first it seemed that there would be little effect other than a slight rise in atmospheric temperature due to the reception of heat radiated from the satellite now warm. Yet we, who know so well how delicate is the balance of the universe, soon began to see that even this slight change could produce far-reaching effects on an inhabited world.

Even so, the effect that was actually produced was one that we ourselves had entirely overlooked. About two of their years after the collision we found a certain uneasiness developing in the minds of the leaders of this world. (We call them the leaders because of their slightly higher intelligence, though, actually, the dwellers on these worlds are largely controlled by a few of their less intelligent but more belligerent individuals.)

It seems that this world, which is so abundantly supplied with water, that some three-fourths of its surface is covered by immense oceans, has a great deal of this water locked up in solidified form in the colder regions around the axial poles. These polar ice-caps, as they may be called, amount in all to some five or six million cubic miles, and their melting must of necessity cause a very appreciable raising of the ocean levels.

*These and other measurements have been given in Earth units for the convenience of earthly readers of this remarkable record. J.L.B.

In fact, when we realized the danger, we calculated that the total disappearance of these ice-caps would raise their oceans, sufficient in fact to inundate all their coastal cities, destroy all their harbors, and permanently flood most of their more thickly populated and most fertile land. The fact that the melting process would take about a hundred of their years, or something more than their little life-cycle, would no doubt minimize the awfulness of the catastrophe. Yet even so, it must almost wreck what little attempt at civilization they had built up, and perhaps thrust them back into an age of complete barbarism, from which it would take them many cycles of time to emerge.

We did not anticipate that the redistribution of pressure would cause any serious volcanic or seismic effects, for, although comparatively thin, the crust of this world is extremely solid and resistant.

Whatever the consequences, the fact remained that the responsibility was ours. Ours had been the hands to perform the first act in this cosmic drama, ours must be the ones to protect this world against its ill effects. But, as we had asked ourselves on the former occasions, "How?"

The melting of this immensity of snow and ice was now inevitable. The raising of the ocean levels appeared equally inevitable. Consequently resultant suffering must in due course follow.

We talked it out from every conceivable angle, only to find ourselves baffled at every turn. Our little ship was powerless to help. To send to Tarlatt for aid would take so long that the mischief would be accomplished long before such aid could arrive, even if some possible way of helping could be devised.

As one of our futile discussions was about to break up, Thildosa, the navigator, remarked sadly:

"It seems an awful pity. Here Planet Three must suffer by reason of these inundations of unwanted water, while Planet Four is dying of thirst."

The noble prince, ever quick and alert, caught part of the remark, turned and, evidently not wanting to neglect the slightest opportunity, said quietly:

"Repeat that, please, Thildosa."

"I merely said, sir," replied the navigator, "that it seems a great pity, and somehow not quite in accord with the Supreme Wisdom, that one world should be half destroyed by floods while its neighbor perishes of thirst."

For a moment the prince seemed startled, as though some surprising thought had come to him. Then, as the expression of surprise faded, he said in a peculiar tone:

"We may not blame the Supreme Wisdom for this, Thildosa. We alone are responsible. Yet your words somehow stir me. Somehow I feel within me that from your very expression of sorrow may come the inspiration that will solve the problem. I feel," he continued, a more confident tone creeping into his voice, "I feel now, for the first time, that somehow this whole chain of events has been not a mistake, but one of those strange leadings of Wisdom, whose purpose we may not fully understand until it is complete.

"Let us retire to our quarters and think."

WHY we failed to see the solution immediately I cannot comprehend. Perhaps it was on account of its very simplicity. The fact remains, however, that many days passed be-

fore the prince, at Thildosa's request, invited us all to another conference.

Then it was that Thildosa gave us the answer.

"Move the water from Planet Three to Planet Four," he said.

"Of course," we all agreed, thinking the problem as good as solved. But again came the old query: "But *how?*"

At home on Tarlatt it would have been merely a problem in mechanics, a huge one truly, but by no means an impossible one. Here, however, conditions were entirely different. To move such a mass away from the attraction of the planet would require tremendous power even though it were handled little by little, for, if it were to be of any use at all, either the removal must keep pace with the melting, or the solid ice must be removed *before* it melted.

The two greatest difficulties were, first, that the mechanical knowledge of these beings was so elementary, and secondly that it was impossible, as previously mentioned, for us to make direct contact with them on account of the great differences in physical structure.

Still, as our wise old philosopher said, "The intelligence that can state and comprehend a problem is sufficient to find its solution or to prove it unsolvable." So we set to work to look for the best method of solution.

A little simple reasoning soon pointed unmistakably to the way. Our only means of contact with these beings was through the influence of our wiser and more developed thought on their primitive minds. Therefore we must exert all our efforts to educate them to the point where they could and would devise and use the necessary machinery and use it in an intelligent manner.

In addition to this, we had to bring them to a state of mind where they would be willing to co-operate, for we certainly had no desire to be the means of starting an interplanetary warfare with all its attendant horrors.

An analysis of their mentalities showed us that, except for a few individuals, the predominant motive among the dwellers on both the third and fourth planets was self-interest. Much, therefore, as we disliked appealing to such a soulless motive, we decided that only so could we get any form of co-operation between them.

For days and weeks we worked, until at length in the consciousness of these strange beings began to dawn the ideas we needed to have them understand.

The idea of communication between planets was not entirely foreign to either world, though, except by a very few, it was regarded as merely a fantastic dream that *might* be realized in some distant future. Still, we continued to work on that as well as on the idea of the mutual benefits to be gained from such communication.

Then, when at last we found the idea of possible communication taking hold, we began to give out to Planet Four, the more technically advanced planet, the first mechanical ideas from which they could develop space-ships.

The chief difficulty here was that of power. Long did we work before we were able to show them how to use and control radiant energy. To our regret, though we realized that it was almost unavoidable, several of their experimenters blew themselves to pieces through inability to grasp fully the ideas we sent them. Strangely enough they never seemed to rea-

lize that these ideas were coming to them from an outside source. So self-centred are their present mentalities that they scarcely even acknowledge that all wisdom comes from the Supreme Intelligence. Rather do they try to credit their own feeble mentalities with such self-creative power.

At length, by the exercise of infinite patience, we did get them to construct a space-ship of a crude and inefficient sort. Then, much to our surprise, they immediately set about improving on their first attempt, so that before long they had at least a dozen very satisfactory ones.

This done, we turned our attention again to the question of radiant communication between the worlds, a matter which proved to be much less difficult, since they already had crude forms of electro-oscillatory transmission among themselves.

The exact method of communicating intelligibly puzzled us somewhat, since there was no common language—in fact the languages of Planet Four are almost entirely different in structure from those of Planet Three.

However, we had no need to concern ourselves on this account, for they solved it themselves by commencing their communications with very simple mathematical statements and problems, following these later on by such symbols and sounds as eventually enabled them to work out a common code.

From that time on, we sat back and, except for a little occasional guidance, let the two worlds work out their own salvation. We felt that, once given the main ideas and the necessary practical knowledge, they would not only work out the solution in a way more satisfactory to themselves than we could do it for them, but that in doing so they would advance

their own development to an enormous degree.

A SHORT account of their procedure is included in this report at the request of the noble prince, who feels that it should be an integral part thereof. Such account follows:

When the first few space-ships had been complete and fully tested, they set out for Planet Three on a diplomatic voyage, intimation of their coming having already been sent out by electro-radiant transmission (a method greatly in advance of their old electro-oscillatory methods, though crude when compared with our own method of transmission).

To our satisfaction their fleet was received with great friendliness, the dwellers on Planet Three uniting as one group, apparently for the first time in their history, to welcome the first interplanetary visitors they had ever known.

You may be assured, Exalted One, that we followed the vicissitudes of their conferences with intense interest, though only once or twice did we deem it wise to influence them towards the peaceable settlement of a difficult and controversial point.

The final outcome, in substance, was this. Planet Three agreed to allow the removal of the surplus water to Planet Four and to assist in its transportation on a basis of said Planet Three's taking one third of the expense and labor. This to us seemed an eminently desirable ratio since it was obvious that Planet Four would be the greater gainer of the two. It was agreed that the transfer should not be conducted at a rate greater than would take care of the melting, so that the oceans of Planet Three should not be lowered below their

original level at any time. Both planets, of course, realized that it might not be possible to attain this rate of removal, but Planet Three was naturally anxious to approximate it if possible.

In addition Planet Four agreed (our suggestion by the way) to divulge the methods of interplanetary flight to their neighbour-world, in exchange for which concession they were granted the right to remove certain desirable minerals from Planet Three's satellite without opposition.

A joint Board of Control was then appointed to work out ways and means of making the transfer, a matter which we could see would tax their mentalities to their utmost.

Even to us of Tarlatt it would have been a tremendous undertaking. To them, especially with the gravitational pull of a larger world to contend with, it must have seemed an utter impossibility. Yet, even so, the prince adhered to his original decision to let them work it out for themselves.

And work it out they did. During the first year or so they did practically nothing but construct space ships of rather small size but of immense power, to the hulls of which were attached grappling hooks and supports.

While most of Planet Four and part of Planet Three were busy constructing and learning to handle this great fleet, which by the end of a year amounted to some five thousand vessels, the remainder of Planet Three busied itself with making great cylindrical containers. Perhaps cylindrical is hardly the correct word, since they had a slight taper towards one end making them really turncated cones with rounded ends. These containers were built of one of the lightest and strongest alloys they were

able to make and were finished to a high polish both inside and out.

Since no internal bracing could be used, and since a smooth and streamlined exterior was also desirable, the shells used had to be of considerable thickness in order to support the weight of their loads. This, unfortunately, if unavoidable, increased their weight to such an amount that it detracted considerably from their efficiency, though in practical use they still proved reasonably satisfactory.

The larger ends of these tanks opened in such a way that the whole contents, which in space would be coated with an ice-film, could be slid out without difficulty. Each tank was designed to contain about a hundred thousand tons of water.

WE watched with extreme fascination the beginning of the removal of the water, the first load of which was lifted amid great pomp and ceremony.

Steadily and carefully a space-ship, with its great tank suspended beneath it, dropped towards the two lines of waiting vessels which had taken formation near the middle of their largest ocean. As it approached the water, the supporting vessel began to move forward, forcing the great tank obliquely below the surface like a giant scoop, the imprisoned air being allowed to escape through valves in the smaller end.

The actual filling of the tank was thus surprisingly rapid. The huge orifice at the larger end was then slammed shut and the vessel with its load swept forward and upward.

This first trip was entirely successful, the loaded tank, despite its immense weight, being lifted and carried out into space with perfect ease by the powerful space cruiser.

Some of the spectator ships certainly got a rough jolting from the wash of the disturbance, but these strange beings took their temporary discomfort in very good part—a peculiarity we had noted previously, and which, somehow, did not seem to jibe with their pugnacious characters.

Upward and forward in a rapidly accelerating course the great ship took its load. Right out beyond the atmosphere it climbed, speeding as it attained a velocity sufficient to cause it to take a natural orbit around the globe.

Then the great doors of the tank were swung open, heating coils were snapped on in its inner shell to melt any surface ice that might have formed (the whole thing had, of course, become heated during its passage at high speed through the atmosphere, but even during the few minutes it remained in empty space, the outer layers became intensely cold, incurring the necessity of melting the ice where it contacted the shell) and with a slight jerk the ship dragged back on her load.

By its own inertia the huge mass of water continued on, free of the tank. Within a short time it formed itself into a slowly revolving ball, and for the time being Planet Three had a new satellite.

Now the work of removal began in real earnest. Minute by minute, almost second by second, a continuous stream of the tank-carrying ships swooped down, grabbed their loads of water, flashed out again into space.

With surprising rapidity the original satellite ice-ball was built up until its total volume was several cubic miles. Then a fresh group of space-ships got to work. Carefully they surrounded the huge ball with an immense steel net, an operation which

required considerable skill even out in space where weight was negligible. Then, slowly and steadily, so as to avoid breaking the ice-shell that already covered the liquid globe, they began to pull.

Without a hitch the operation was carried out. Within a few hours the first of these millions of balls of water was on its way to its new home, following an orbit calculated to intercept that of Planet Four.

As soon as it was well established on its course, the towing vessels cast loose and returned for another ball, leaving the original one to make its own way, convoyed only by two vessels, which were sufficient to make the slight alterations and corrections of its course that were necessary from time to time.

SO the work went on, increasing in rapidity and efficiency until now they were sending out a steady stream of water-balls at the rate of nearly a hundred in each day.

The handling of the water-balls on their arrival we also found interesting. As each ball arrived within about five diameters of the planet it was again seized by a fleet of ships, the original network having, of course, been left on it. Its velocity was then reduced so that it again became a temporary satellite outside the planetary atmosphere.

We did not at first see just what method they had planned for lowering these partly frozen balls without doing great damage to their world, but as we watched, we decided that their method was perhaps the most ingenious and efficient that could have been devised.

As rapidly as their fleets could work, they took the balls that were circling around their planet, and, one

by one, towed them out of their orbits towards a point over their uninhabited polar regions. There they checked their velocity rapidly by dragging on them with extremely powerful ships, until they began to fall like slow meteorites towards the surface of the planet.

Until we had actually seen one of the balls fall, we expected it to drop with a terrific crash and the formation of a huge meteoric crater, a course of events that must eventually strain the planet almost to disruption.

However, in this instance their scientists proved wiser than ours, for no such crashes occurred. The downward rush through the atmosphere was found to produce sufficient friction to break up and partly melt the icy shells that had formed during the long, cold journey through space. The result was that the water-globes, as they rushed through the atmosphere, were broken up and scattered over a wide area, producing a titanic spattering of ice, water, and steam.

Of course the whole terrain of the polar regions was torn up into a chaos of mud, which soon became the nucleus of a new ocean, or rather of two oceans, one at each pole.

Now the reason for this peculiar plan appeared more plainly. In the earlier days of their civilization these beings had developed a world-wide irrigational system so that they could utilize the seasonal melting of their own polar ice-caps to eke out their failing water supply. Now it was a comparatively simple matter to enlarge and extend the ancient system to form a means of distributing the new water to the desired regions.

Already we can see the beneficent results of our work. Already the arid Planet Four shows a new fertility. Al-

ready, for the first time in many thousand of years, its dwellers are experiencing the refreshing coolness of rain-showers, and we are confident that by the time the project is completed the whole planet will be blossoming with a wondrous fertility, for, instead of its former miserable patches of half-stagnant moisture, it will have great oceans covering at least a fourth of its surface to a depth of perhaps two thousand feet or more.

On Planet Three the effect is, naturally, much less marked. A great calamity has been averted and a world saved from partial destruction by flood, but except for a little increase in fertility due to the greater warmth, there is little change.

On the other hand, the benefits accruing to both worlds from their enforced co-operation will remain for all time. The old spirit of mutual hostility is rapidly dying out. At last these beings seem to have learned the folly of such ways and the wisdom of working peacefully together for the common good.

And so we leave them to return to our own place, thankful to the Supreme Wisdom for the knowledge that the loosing of our sub-satellite was not after all a folly, but a step so inspired and wise as to have been of incalculable value to two distant worlds, as well as to our own.

THE noble prince sends greeting to Your Highness and to the Princess Letana, and instructs us to say that we are returning to Tarlatt with all speed, and expect to arrive within the twenty years.

Report confirmed by Kestron,
Prince of Tarlatt,
Submitted by the hands of Elzar
the Archivist.

THE END

Science and the Saucepans

By
JULIA
BOYNTON
GREEN

How dangerous it is to live!
If we had known the peril
Of germs—the care we'd have to give
To keep each darned thing "sterile,"

We would have dodged being born I guess,
We would have stayed I'll wager
In comfortable nothingness
Up baiting Ursa Major.

Nothing we have to eat, it seems,
Is wholesome if it's tasty.
All sauces you must shun—and creams,
They make your color pasty.

You can't eat eggs or beans or meats
Or you invite "necrosis;"
No starch or sweets, no snacks or treats,
For fear of "acidosis."

The lowly kraut ranks high today,
If you would be well fed you'll
Stow lots and lots of it away
And star it on your schedule.

Often, hid deep within our works,
Demanding circumspection,
Grim goggled M.D.s find there lurks
A "focus of infection."

We must keep tab on vitamins
And calories and such like.
We pay for dietetic sins
In gripes that we don't much like.

As though we hadn't plagues enough
There's still that weird "milk culture."
Before I'd touch the loathesome stuff
I'd seek a swift sepulture!

I ask you. *What* shall be our meals?
Give that your contemplation.
There's left, this screed of mine reveals,
A microscopic ration.

A breakfast, I submit, of bran,
To dodge foes that beset us.
For lunch, five prunes; a prudent plan.
And if you'd add to life's brief span
Dine sparingly on lettuce.

Luvium Under the Sand

By A. R. McKENZIE

The author tells us the story of a great nation living underground and of the mystic powers they could exert. Many of our readers will remember Luvium, written by this author several years ago.

CHAPTER I

I OPENED my eyes to find a bronzed, black-haired giant bending over my cot. A snub-nosed automatic was clutched in one huge fist, its wicked little snout barely three inches from my forehead.

"Coward," I heard him mutter. "Shoot. There is no other way."

Hours, it seemed, I waited, scarcely daring to breathe. Rapidly I checked back. I recalled the desert twister that had caught me at the Libyan border and had driven me far out over that hell of waste land. And the crack-up—a series of roller coaster dips, a wing gone, and a long fluttering dive.

Now I woke to find this grim-faced giant with a gun against my aching head. A sputtering gas lamp somewhere behind me high-lighted the stern features above. Weird shadows danced across the crumbling walls that penned us in. The stench of medicines mingled freely with the peculiar musty smell of age.

In fascination I gazed into that pistol bore. It moved. The hand wavered; the brown arm dropped.

"Later," the burly stranger growled. He jammed the pistol into the belt of his tattered shorts and threw himself down in a near-by deck chair.

I gasped and tried to rise. I felt the pull of bandages and a tightness in

my right leg. Waves of prickly heat chased through my body.

"Awake?"

I dropped back. The killer was watching me intently. Weak as I was, I saw red.

"Kill a man on his back, would you?" I flared.

The chill blue eyes held my own unwaveringly. The voice was pitiless.

"Perhaps. You will die anyway when I leave. . . . You are Jim Merton?"

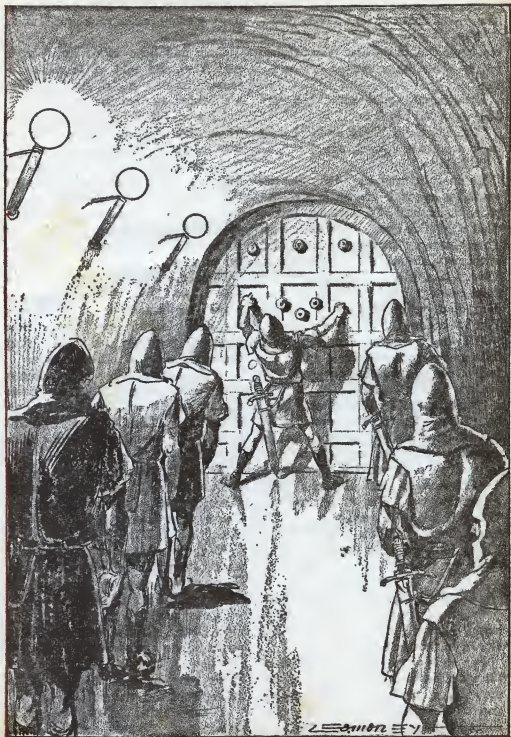
I nodded. The devil had been through my clothes. I thought of the six hundred dollars in my shirt—gas money for Cairo. With that gone and my ship a total wreck, it meant my pleasure jaunt around the world was off.

"I am the mad-man of Sidah," the fellow snapped. "Jack Wright by name. You have heard of me?"

I had. Even on the coast. A fool that roamed the lifeless Libyan chasing a mirage—or gold.

The mighty shoulders jerked fiercely.

"A mad-man," Jack Wright snarled. "Two years treading this molten hell earned me that name. But I won!" he roared suddenly, his eyes dots of flame in an angry sea of brown. "I beat the desert; beat the fools who called me mad. . . . Now you! You," he ended hollowly, "have come to hold me back."



Still tense, I waited while he spun the many dials. This could not last. I studied the faces of those about me—sullen features now that the excitement was over.

The big hands opened and closed. There was death in that steady glare.

"Rot," I growled. "I'm holding no one back. Call in the man who patched me up—then go wherever you're going."

He relaxed, spoke rapidly, a sardonic grin on his face.

"I'm the man. We're alone. I sent back my outfit a week ago."

"What!"

"Alone," he grinned. "Fifty feet beneath the sands. In the ancient record room in the hall of knowledge in the dead city of Zandu." He wet his lips. Three hundred feet below us, sealed in the rock, are other cities of the past, Thista. Zandu and Thista, unknown monuments to two great races that flourished before history was born. You are amused?"

If I was, I held my laughter. Only fools and very brave men laugh in the face of death. I watched his eyes. The fire was fading.

"There is more," Wright said curtly. "Below Thista, the lowest city, there begins a series of earth vaults stretching for miles through the rock to Luvium. A living city, peopled by men of vast intellect. Superior men. A woman, too." His voice was low. "For her alone, I have tramped the sands seeking this, the only entrance. I have found it. Now you threaten to delay my return."

A GAIN the eyes telegraphed danger. I turned it aside. Shamelessly, I played to his weakness—the city of his warped mind.

For an hour he raved of his buried kingdom locked in the rock far below under a gigantic, pressure-resisting dome. I gathered that two years back there had been an expedition. He and a scientist named Carr, after stumbling on these two ruined cities—

Zandu and Thista—had followed the mighty seam in the rock and found a living nation.

Carr had been killed but Wright had lived. He told of learning the tongue, meeting a girl, and of leading a rebellion against the King.

"But we failed," Wright concluded. "They cut us down. Our one chance was to escape the city, gain the surface. Almost we won—myself and two faithfuls, Votta, the girl, and Latvu, the real leader of the revolt.

"But Zemd, a crafty noble and favorite of the king, tricked us neatly. He let us reach the tunnel mouth that led to safety, open the massive door—he even waited till I had crept inside to scout hidden traps, before he played his scurvy hand. He swung the door, locking me forever from Luvium, sending me back alone through the caves to the surface.

"Since then, life has been a hell of uncertainty. For Votta, the Beauteous, and Latvu, the Cheerful, are in his hands. The Cheerful, of course, is dead—he would not play me false. But Votta—"

He left it that way. I slept. In my dreams I fought millions of white-skinned giants in a rockbound city where war was king and life was very cheap.

When he came again with his sputtering lamp he brought good news. His face was haggard as though he had spent the night with his problem.

"I can not kill you," he said, "any more than I could have let you die beneath your plane. Nor can I leave you unattended. There is only one solution. When your leg has healed, we go together back to Luvium."

A painstaking fellow, this unfortunate soul. Normal and likable in every way, but firm in his belief in his mythical kingdom. He would take

me to Luvium—on one condition: that I have complete knowledge of the city, its customs and its language. I agreed.

Religiously, I buckled into my work. For he was the master—till I could move. With a pistol in my hand there might be a different ending.

My leg healed perfectly. I was up and around, fat and flabby from a steady diet of his tasteless dehydrated foods. But Wright whipped me into shape. Long walks in the cool of the night, endless sparring matches and constant work-outs with two make-shift swords, which he insisted were patterned after those of his city.

"The blade is paramount in Luvium," he stated. "There is much close fighting and their radium rifles cover too much ground."

We battled. Though I gave away only a fraction of an inch in stature, I could not match his sparkling play. He did not know that many of my thrusts were in dead earnest. I had no qualms in the matter. In the end, when he found his city existed only in his mind, one of us would die. If I could have found where he hid his automatic, it would have been over long ago.

The night of our departure I was doubly on guard. The equipment Wright had was surprising. Powerful flashes, compact oxygen containers—everything. But even to the end he had only one misgiving. He seemed to fear that Luvium had fallen before a sister city and had been annihilated.

"That is the reason for my food cache," he explained tersely. "But your coming has exhausted the supply. I left word for my outfit to trek back in six months to pick me up if Luvium was in ruins. There isn't food enough left for six days. Pray for Luvium."

I prayed, fervently. For days I had been wondering what I would do after I killed him—if I did kill him. I had seen enough of my plane left above the sand to know that she would never fly again. To strike out alone across that flaming, tree-less waste would be suicide. Luvium had to be there.

WE carried great packs; even our hair was cut in correct warrior fashion. And as we marched down the long slanting tunnel, which up till now had been forbidden territory, I suffered vague misgivings.

Here before us was Zandu, mighty monarch of the past. Though its streets were buried under tons of sand, remnants of great buildings and triangular halls still persisted.

Below Zandu I began to doubt my own sanity. Here, just as Wright had stated, were massive bores stretching down through the rock. Iron ladders took us down, down—to Thista! No sand here. Only solemn, stately edifices with cleared streets and rebuilt sections, where, in some forgotten day, ancient archaeologists from upper Zandu had found fertile ground. It was a city of cubes with endless hieroglyphics everywhere.

From then on I ceased to think. We found the mining shafts that the Thistaans had drilled into the rock beneath them; found the one that led to the series of earth vaults.

There we hesitated. Jack Wright's eyes were bright through the oxygen mask.

"Still here," he cried. "I was afraid. Now—on to Luvium!"

Somehow I stumbled after him. Twice we ate and slept. The line of march was most irregular. The fissure twisted and doubled, widened to huge caverns only to narrow to tiny slits

through which we could hardly force our heavy packs.

Then, the hour, the minute, the second!

We stood before a massive door at the end of a crooked, fifty-foot tunnel, metal-plated. Without a word I dropped my pack and grasped the hand of one of the finest men I have ever known. Jack Wright. Somehow I think he understood why. A shade seemed to lift from his strong face; a mist gathered in his eyes.

"We are here," Wright said, and it did not seem unusual to hear him speak the tongue of his city. "Before us lies work. We are together?"

"Together," I replied, and our pact was sealed.

Our plans were laid. Excellent plans. We unshipped a powerful torch, capable of sheering through the strongest alloy of the surface, and played the flame across the barrier. No result. In desperation we planted a charge of high explosive at its base. Wright, himself, packed the discharging box back around two curves and threw the switch.

There was an ear-splitting detonation. Dust of centuries sprayed far down the passage. Somewhere back of us a section of the wall beyond the metal plates thundered to the floor, adding rumbling echoes to the frightful roar reverberating through the tube.

As one, we raced forward. Time was at a premium. We would barely have time to race through the shattered door, gain the ingenious carriers of the buried city, and make our escape from these mines before the guards arrived. For I knew it all; Wright had been a zealous teacher.

Sensitive detectorscopes, I had been told, would instantly record the unusual blast and bring a squad of

quick-fingered sentinels at double time.

Thus, we raced up through the dust to find the door—intact. The surface was not even scratched.

The last of our well laid plans went tumbling into nothingness. Minutes we stood in silent horror. Then came another sound. Faint at first, then louder.

The clank, clank of steel against steel.

"The guard," Wright cried. "Back for your life!"

CHAPTER II

BACK we scurried, snapping off our lights as we reached the second turn. The muffled clank had ceased. Now a series of clicks rang hollowly through the darkened passage.

"The door," whispered my friend. "They're spinning the combinations of the intricate lock. Listen."

More clicks, then a grating sound. We heard the shuffle of feet and the quiet voice of the squad commander. The sonorous speech and the soft glow of torches beyond the curve dispelled my last cloud of doubt. The tongue of Luvium was not a myth. And thanks to Wright, I could understand.

"Stand!" came the voice of the unseen leader. "It may be a trap. A strange gas seems mingled with the dust. Two I need. You Kakaz—and Zato. Into the tunnel. Cry out if you are surprised. It may be only a quake. Go!"

There was a scuffling of feet. The two named had entered. The steady blue light played on the dust; grew stronger. I turned on Wright. He had unmasked and his face was grim.

"Off with the helmet," he whispered tersely. "Two men. Club with your

flashlight. At the base of the head-dress."

I complied. So it was fight. Small wonder. These were the mines of Zemd, the villainous noble who had stolen Wright's girl, Votta. We could expect no mercy from him.

Ready and waiting, I hugged the wall. The light grew more intense. Wiser warriors would have paused before they swung into hidden recesses, but not so Kakaz and Zato. On they came, eager to prove themselves the bravest of the brave. Two steps past us they blundered before they realized their mistake.

Up went two steel cases. And down. It was my first glimpse of a stalwart denizen of the wonder city, Luvium—and I struck to kill—at the base of the white-skinned giant's helmet. There was a sickening thud and Zato went down in a heap.

Wright was bent low over his man, stripping him of weapons and harness.

"Do the same," he said rapidly. "Our one chance. They'll kill us on sight in our strange clothes."

My fingers became the proverbial thumbs. Wright was dressed and waiting before I had the sleeveless, knee-length under garb in place. Metal it was—strange, fabricated metal, soft as down. My daring comrade wrapped the jewel-studded metal straps, comprising the warrior's harness, about me and helped with the clinch buckles. He pointed to the intricate design sketched with gems across the shirt front.

"The House of Zemd," he grunted. "He still controls these mines. It proves that the attack by the sister city failed."

A voice sang out from beyond the curves. It was the commander.

"You men," he called. "Is there trouble?"

"None," Wright shouted without hesitation. "We are coming back." And in an undertone: "Scoop up some dust and coat your face and arms. To hide the tan. If we can only get close enough, mingle with them, before we are discovered, they won't have a chance with the radium rifle. It'll be blades and fight. Hurry!"

WHILE he spoke, I slipped on the curious, pointed sandals and donned the light headdress that partly covered my face. Fight! Once more I bent to the floor. When I straightened Wright's .38 was hidden beneath the trappings at my waist. But outwardly I was a Luvium warrior. At my side hung the heavy short sword. I carried a short barreled rifle—and I knew how to use it. Wright had schooled me well.

Strangely calm, I trailed this quick-witted adventurer to the tunnel's end. He carried the light. There was a grim smile on his face.

Coated with dust and with heads averted we stepped boldly into the heart of the group knotted by the door. I caught my breath. These were men, clear-featured and sturdy, none under six feet. Fighting men—wearing the crest of the House of Zemd. Enemies, then.

The instant I set foot on the smooth metal floor of the mine, my hand flashed beneath my harness. Steady fingers wrapped around the cool steel. I half-turned and a curse escaped me. Wright had made no move. Madness that. Any second now, friends of the fallen warriors would shout the word. If we struck first we might have a chance.

But my guide played a daring hand. His head went up. His blue light,

as if by chance, was trained squarely into the stern face of the commander.

"It was a quake," Wright explained. He had slipped his helmet back so that the chin strap dangled across his mouth. "The tunnel buckled three turns back."

The commander threw up his hand to shade his eyes. "Then, cut out the light," he growled, "and fix that helmet. Tidy your harness. You are a disgrace to the House of Zemd."

He turned abruptly to the huge door and sent it crashing into place. His manner was that of one cheated out of a fight. He had not even glanced in my direction.

Still tense, I waited while he spun the many dials. This could not last. I studied the faces of the men about me. Sullen faces, now that the excitement was over, with eyes down-cast and chill. No man looked at his neighbor. Something weighty and deep seemed to hold each man to his thoughts.

The barrier closed, the leader barked the marching order. The formation was in twos; Wright and I fell in behind. And we were off tramping through the wide, steel-encased passages that were part of the gigantic mine system encircling the city of Luvium. Ahead somewhere, lay the mighty metropolis itself. There lived millions, entombed millions, who had been content to remain for eons prisoners of the rock, while the unknowing world went by above.

Our commander was suffering from a bad case of nerves. Twice he snapped needless disciplinary orders and the ten black scowls that his consorts shot back were not pretty to see.

"Fortune smiles," whispered Jack Wright at his first opportunity. "But look sharp. Answer no questions. At

the first intersection we will make a break.

"Silence!" boomed a voice. "Stand!"

The squad clicked to a halt. The commander fairly leaped upon us.

"Sons of dirt!" he roared. "Again you whisper. And you two not three work periods at my station! But you know the law. To the front, shale!"

Our rifles were torn from our hands; our blades lifted from our belts. We headed a column of twelve with the irate leader hard by our side. Arrested and disarmed. I patted the bulge at my waist. Not even Wright knew I had an ace in the hole.

I dared a quick glance at that silent warrior. His face was like a mask.

On we marched. The passage-way branched; a curt command sent us to the left. Left! Right, according to my informant, was the way to conveyances of these entombed people and to the city and safety.

THE radium lights, lining the tube, grew brighter, adding to our peril, an odd light, under variously tinted coverings that housed an infinitesimal fragment of that rare metal, whose deepest secrets had been known to this race when the Cromagnon man of the surface was fighting for the right to live.

The passage widened. An abrupt turn brought us to a large circular room. The door slid behind us. It was like the inside of a tank.

"Dismissed," snapped the one in charge. "Stack arms and to your rest. Kakaz and Zato to the Tentav—your shift is doubled for the infringement of the law."

With a start I realized that he had spoken to us. I had been watching the room undergo an amazing transfiguration. A warrior, stepping to the wall, had uncovered a control board.

He ran nimble fingers over the keys banked in typewriter fashion.

Doors in the wall snapped aside, revealing cramped one-man cells. Gun racks leaped from the floor and vanished with the rifles. The men retained their swords, marching sullenly to their chambers. A spotless desk materialized against the wall opposite the warriors' sleeping quarters. There went our arrogant sergeant. I felt Wright grasp my arm.

"Here," he muttered in the confusion. "We are ordered to the Tentav. I think I can work it. Watch and say nothing."

A dozen feet around the wall about mid-way between the commander's desk and the first cell, a compact little machine had sprung into being. No wires—just a foot square screen at the top of a sloping panel. In rows down this control board were fifty or more slender rods with ball-like tips. At the base of each was a meaningless scrawl interposed on lines similar to music bars. I had yet to learn the written language of Luvium.

Two hard stools were built into the superstructure. Wright took the one centering on the board, I sat on his right. I experienced an insane urge to laugh. I wanted time to think; to study this new world, its people, to our condition would not allow it.

Much Wright had told me of Luvium in the long weeks when I thought him mad. This machine I knew as the Tentav, the detectorscope, a delicate instrument fashioned to register instantly any serious disturbances in this particular section. It was a sentinel, with its first duty to detect signs of invasion from other cities, like Luvium, and far away in the rock.

Since the beginning of time there had been conquest. Legions from distant nations had periodically drilled

through to attack. Four times in the past Luvium had been over-run by triumphant hordes, only to rise to greater heights. Because of this, early history was purely legendary.

There was a theory, one of many, as to the origin of these buried peoples. Luvium, so stated the Oduba theory, was once a surface city. A huge transparent covering of tremendous strength was built to guard against the inroads of ice that came to threaten life. Synthetic foods, radium, electricity—all combined to sustain that life. For centuries this great race of whites dwelt thus in safety. Then one of the many changes of earth contours dropped city and all far beneath the surface.

There were other theories, and I learned them all, but for none was there positive truth. I accepted Luvium as it was. Indeed, so fast did life move, I had little time for idle musings, even on its present day marvels. Already, I had discovered a new nation, entered it, joined its army and had gone to work. But I falsify.

I did no work. Jack Wright, profiting by past experience, stepped into the breach with a confidence that was marvelous to behold.

He played the controls of the Tentav like a veteran—testing. In the screen before us, flashing in order, appeared each of the scrawls under the keys. He bent slightly to touch the last row bringing his lips close to my ear.

"Heads up," he breathed. "We're in bad. There have been changes. They keep the men in cells; forbid any conversation. It must be the old story—fear of revolt. Such is life in Luvium. Baku must still be king, or Dedul, as he is called. I saw him once, a wizened, crafty—quiet!"

A voice was heard behind us. I turned slightly. Our commander was

apparently reporting the squad's activity to some one higher in rank. He spoke through a tiny, tubular machine at his right, and used entire sentences that I could not catch.

"Official Jargon," whispered my comrade. "I taught you only the language of the warrior . . . Look!"

The screen flashed red. Blue scrawls crept into being, starting at the bottom, shooting across and darting back a line above. When the thing was done it resembled a badly treated sheet of music.

I UNDERSTOOD—printed directions. Each section above corresponded with a key on the board. Wright would flick a control and part of the bluish print would vanish. Twice he blundered and each time there was a grinding whir and a voice, apparently from the screen itself, would blat, "Wrong!"

The commander from his desk behind us snarled:

"Get it right, fool. It may be important."

Wright growled and made the corrections. He touched the last key and the screen sprang to life.

I was prepared for anything but this. The box became a miniature stage. Inside three dimension figures, in color, suddenly appeared. I looked upon a dozen men grouped back of a long snake-like machine that nearly filled the circular bore. Its snout was buried in a mass of broken rock. A man stood facing us. His lips moved.

"All right," came a low voice apparently from the picture itself. "Dintar of the sixth section, bore twelve A, talking. The tunnel crumpled before the machine could weld the pressure plates in place. Carry on."

My companion glanced over his shoulder.

"Cut," grunted the commander with a snap of his fingers. I heard the men to our left shuffle back to their cells. Wright jiggled a key and the screen went dead.

"Understand?" he whispered as the guttural voice took up its dictation behind us. "That was a melting machine. It melts the rock and drives it back to the plants. There are many of these. Elements of the rock furnish food, drink and air for these people. Attention!"

Again the flashing signal. This was more serious; an accident on the Taumbs Carrier system within our range. An automatic control on one of the hanging chairs had failed, causing the chair to rocket full speed into a station at the end of the line.

The taumbs, which I now looked upon for the first time, were like over-stuffed chairs, suspended from an over-head rail. The rider had a choice of three speeds on three different rails—choosing his rail by means of a miniature gear shift on the left arm of the car. A designation dial and pointer were on his right. All that was necessary when wanting to ride was to pick the station, choose the rail, and automatic controls carried the car, or train of cars, smoothly and silently to the journey's end.

The excited drone of many warriors almost drowned out the terse explanation that came through from the noble in charge.

"The switch control failed," explained the jewel-laden fellow through our picture. "On second speed. Because of this the braking mechanism did not function properly. One was killed. Carry on."

"Cut," snapped our commander.

I turned to Wright.

"This tentav is an uncanny instrument. Can you explain it?"

He shrugged. "Only the principle. The machine itself is powered by magnetic energy, electricity—a force which is an inexplicable mystery to the surface world.

"Each shielded radium light within our range (about five miles) is wired directly to this tentav. In radio terminology, each light is a potential microphone. Behind the microphone, and eye in this case, is the transmitting apparatus which is automatically set into action by any undue vibration within a set radius. The Beta Rays of radium, treated and filtered, by the tinted shield, pick up the scene. One of many forms of magnetic energy carries the impulse to the transmitter which in turn relays the entire picture, sight, color and sound, to this receiver."

He turned to the board as the screen went red once more.

From then on there was no rest. Picture after picture glowed and faded. Here an entire section of an outlying tunnel had buckled, steel plates and all, under the frightful pressure of the rock.

Then a scene of horror from the pitchblende* mines. There, a prisoner, condemned to slow death by his proximity to the radium ore, had gone berserk. He had killed six of his fellow sufferers and destroyed his machine by the time the picture formed. We saw a lesser noble, in his safety suit, burn the man down with his silent radium rifle.

Still another picture came, slowly to form—a picture of a large metal door. Faintly through the concealed speaker came the sound of hammering, on the opposite side. Then a muffled voice.

"Tentav, attention. Kakaz and Zato reporting. We were struck down from behind, stripped of our harness, locked within the Mystic Bore. Beware—"

I shot a glance of horror towards Wright. His eyes told the story. Kakaz and Zato—alive! And we had struck to kill. Wright's fingers raced over the controls; the picture faded.

Though the room was cool, beads of perspiration crept to my brow. A fly bit deep into the nape of my neck. Unconsciously I lifted my hand to brush it away. A fly! There were no insects in Luvium.

I turned my head quickly. Behind me stood one of the squad. A massive paw held a short sword. Its point scraped my ear as I turned.

"Congeal!" he ordered in no uncertain tones.

I did as ordered. I was staring hard at Jack Wright. His face was tragic; his body tense. Two men held him at sword points.

CHAPTER III

"**B**LUNDERING idiots!" roared the commander. He stood just behind his men. "You think I am blind? Stand or you die!"

Up we came with three ready blades at our backs.

"To the prison cell," was the curt command.

In we marched. A grating slid over the opening. I leaned disgustedly against the hanging cot.

"There is a saying," I grunted, staring grimly at the dim red light above. "Something about dying for a sheep as a lamb."

"Wright ripped off his helmet. "We will not die," he snapped in a voice too low to carry to the room beyond. "It's a long way from here to the cells of death. I escaped once; I will again.

*Pitchblende is a mineral consisting largely of uranium oxide. It has acquired great importance as a source of radium.

Thank God, they do not know me as Adu, The Stranger."

"Adu?" I questioned.

"My name in the other days. But forget I told you."

With serious eyes he fumbled at a panel. It seemed as if everything in this amazing city was folded away in the walls. Here was everything, a wash basin, a triangular case packed with soaps and delicate perfumes—even a shower set back in the niche in which a heated red liquid sprayed from every angle.

We even shaved. A thick green paste spread lightly over the face sheered off the bristles close to the skin. Food came, synthetic solids and liquids delivered from a central station on Wright's order.

Once again clothed in proper Luvium style, and with my pistol at my belt, I felt like a new man.

"What now?" I asked.

"Quiet!"

Wright was staring past me into the room beyond. I spun around. The commander was rising, a thin metal sheet in his hands. His face was like stone.

"Attention, men," he snapped. "The Dedul speaks. Listen: 'All warriors whether in privately owned or public mines are advised that, during the period of their enlistment, they are to remain at their posts. Leaves of absence, off-periods and the like are to be spent within their quarters. No one will be allowed to spend such within the city as has been the custom. Violators of this order will be punished by death. This decree is final.' And it is signed by: 'Baku, Most-wise, All-seeing, All-powerful Dedul.'"

There was a clank of arms, the scuffle of many feet. A hard-faced giant stepped from the cell beside us. His hand played close to his blade.

For a long moment he glared murder at the commander. Then he spoke.

"If," he said slowly in a voice that cut like a knife, "Baku, Most-blind, seeks to terminate a highly unsuccessful reign by this, the latest of his outrageous decrees, he has surpassed the wildest of his dreams. Warriors of Luvium are nearing the end of their patience."

Other men crept into range. It looked like open revolt but the commander proved his metal.

"I heard nothing, Toulm," he said. "Nor do I see men leaving their cells. I am blind. Let not any hasty action clear my sight. Back to your rests before I relent and throw this switch that will bring fifty of Zem'd's finest to spread death."

There were mutterings and thinly veiled threats. But the line wavered. Toulm, our neighbor, was the last to retreat. He glanced our way as if seeking support. His teeth were clenched. Then with a shrug he disappeared into his cell. My comrade was staring through the grating.

"Baku," he whispered, and I knew his thoughts.

Baku, heartless ruler, of whom I had heard so much, still held his wrinkled carcass in his spectacular, suspended chair and screamed orders down on his powerless council.

"Revolt again," breathed Wright. "It has not changed. Baku is a citizen, not a warrior. He delights in restricting the fighting men. This man Toulm has spoken the minds of thousands. We may yet see action—perhaps Latvu, himself, leads this new attack."

"Latvu?"

"He was my lieutenant during the last uprising. A mighty warrior. He whom I left with Votta at the end of the surface tunnel."

THE order machine on the desk across the room tinkled a warning. Another sheet flashed into form. At once we were ordered from our cell.

And as we stepped boldly into the brighter lights of the main chamber, we realized our terrible mistake. The leader was staring at us with unbelieving eyes.

"Mother of Rock!" he swore. "Those arms. What hellish disease is this?"

I glanced down. From elbow to finger tips the ugly brown showed clear. Tan—no longer masked by the dust. A rarity in Luvium, where clear white skin is crowning glory.

Jack Wright was blacker than I.

"The light," he grunted with a quickness of thought that was characteristic. "It is at fault. I felt the burns even as we entered." He looked up fearlessly. "Why are we held?"

There was a crafty gleam in the eyes of the leader. "You shall see," was all he said.

He turned to the three warriors who held us ever at the tips of their blades. I noticed that one was the man Toulm, who had spoken his mind.

"Chain them and go," snapped the commander. "If they are lost, you die."

Toulm drew a shiny slender tube from his harness and swung its nose in our direction. There was a singing whine. Instantly a tremendous weight dropped upon my arms and upper body. I tried to cry out, to reach for my automatic, but had not the power. I saw as if through a thick mist.

"March!"

The command came through, as if from a great distance, yet the huge warrior who had uttered it stood right before me.

Automatically, it seemed, my right foot went out. Then the left. From waist down I could move but above I was held in a relentless vise. Though I could not turn my head I knew Wright marched at my side, chained as I and as mystified as I.

Out we went, and to the right in the opposite direction from which we had come. On and on we dragged along an endless passage. Once a warrior grasped my arm and yanked me into an intersecting bore. I almost fell as I turned. I had a brief glimpse of Wright and the fellow, Toulm, who held the little tube always upon us. Then, they were gone. Hours later, it seemed, I felt a noticeable lifting of the terrific weight and heard a voice cry: "Stand!"

I stopped and turned. Prone on the floor at my feet lay Jack Wright, face up and with eyes like a dead man. Toulm and one of his companions were in heated discourse.

"The ray," Toulm cried. "I swear I kept it always at two-point. This tube is faulty."

"So you say," snarled the other. "I saw you throw it over to the three-point. Look! You have it now on Vuma. Son of Shale," he screamed as the fellow called Vuma crashed to the floor, "I see your scheme."

His hand flashed to his sword. Toulm, with a triumphant grin, dropped the tube and drew his steel.

"A clever man," he taunted. "I asked you once to join me, but you refused. I will not ask again."

"It would do you no good," growled the other leaping forward. "Six Zuaes of work separates me from a noble of the twelfth rank. I should risk that on this mad venture? Never!"

Somehow the words came clearer. Life was seeping back into my arms,

into my body. I make no attempt to explain this unusual happening. Indeed, the best on the surface could not duplicate this latest Luvium marvel, the paralytic ray. One of many forms of magnetic energy are focused and attuned to the motor nerve fibers of the body. Impulses born in the twin hemispheres of the cerebrum, magnetic in nature as they are, are neutralized by the application of this four-point tube.

Point-one, or control one, is very weak. The victim merely staggers drunkenly under its power. Point-two is stronger—only the legs can be controlled, and even then the action is half reflexive. At point-three the prisoner has no control, and at point-four there is death, for, as in all cases, there is an over-lapping of the deadening charge. Four amounts to a practical short circuiting of not only the cerebrum, but of the medulla oblongata as well. And this is death, because involuntary action ceases.

Vision cleared rapidly. I saw Toulm beat back the other's charge. There was a second or two of brilliant play, then his assailant bent low slashing for the legs. But Toulm was not there. So quick did he move I saw only blurred whiteness and the flash of steel.

A SWORD flew out of the *mêlée* and clattered against the tunnel wall. Toulm stepped in with a cry of triumph. His blade went up—and down.

I raised my arm in silent tribute. I could move. Wright, already on his feet, had come up with the fallen warrior's sword.

"On guard, Toulm," he snarled, but the man threw up his hand.

"At ease, fellow," he cried. "We are

together." He spun around on the fifth of our little party, Vuma, whom he had sent down with the ray. The mine guard, a heavy set man with skin a shade darker than that of any of the squad, was just regaining his strength.

"By my blade," he swore thickly. "That paralytic charge is effective. I felt as though the very rock held me. Three-point, was it not?"

As he spoke he stooped casually for the tube but Toulm, ever-cautious, was before him.

"Vuma," he said coming up with the weapon, "you have looked on treason. What say you—are you one of us?"

"One! Too long have we of the warrior class scraped on our bellies before Baku. It is time we acted."

"Then we are four," said Toulm staring grimly at Wright and myself.

"Of course," my friend began—and stopped. He had caught it, too. The barest fluttering of an eyelid—a warning as though Toulm mistrusted this latest recruit. Something else, perhaps, for Wright was suddenly alert.

"That voice," I heard him mutter. "I have heard it before. But the face—" But Toulm had swung away.

"We must work fast," he said. "We are over-due at the station. You two—I know not your real names nor do I care—you two walk in front as before. Vuma and myself will trail. I will chain you with the ray. Fear not, for my plans are well laid. I will release you when we are safely in the city."

Without a word Wright surrendered his sword and the march began. Again the oppressive weight stole upon me, numbed my brain. The far-

ther we went the greater the lethargy I suffered. I hardly knew when we boarded the taumb chairs.

Guards hooked up four chairs while Toulm held us with the ray; Vuma strapped us in. How they explained the absence of the fifth of our party I could only guess. I do know that many minutes passed and that there was much talk, before we finally shot out of the station and into the long darkened bore.

From rail to rail we darted gaining greater speed on each change, till it seemed that we fairly flew. Yet there was no sound.

I was first in a train of four and my sluggish thoughts centered on Toulm. Undoubtedly a friend; possibly he had even recognized Wright as Adu, The Stranger. And that warning sign. It meant, of course, to hold our tongues. For there was Vuma, an unwanted fourth. Great would be the reward for the man who handed Adu over to the Dedul. For Adu had headed a rebellion in the other days.

Our ride was short. Our speed was cut as we rocketed back to the first rail. With a sickening lurch we dropped from semi-darkness into brilliant light. Even as we clicked to a halt I felt the force of the ray withdrawn.

It was the junction point for Zem'd's private mine system and that of the inter-city taumbs. A madhouse of sound burst upon us as we ground to a halt. A platform was to our right, a continuous platform, like a mighty croquet wicket with its open end backed against the wall behind us. Two bores fed the inside of this wicket, an entrance tube through which we had just come, and an exit for the chair, when guards had swung it forward around the bend to the out-

going section of the platform many feet to our left.

Our entrance, of course, was through the wall feeding the mines. Across the big hall were the city taumbs proper, with much larger platforms and tubes double in size.

But it was the roar of the mighty throng that filled my heart with dread. As soon as vision cleared, I could see hundreds jamming the nearest stations. Ahead and below, the inner court was packed with men, women and children, who, for the most part, wore the somber blue garb designating them as citizens and workers of the shops.

There were warriors, too; pallid-faced giants, whose faces gleamed coldly in the ever-changing lights that played without glare across that sea of humanity. Warriors armed to the teeth.

Fifty stood thus, glistening blades in hand, on the platform directly to our right. Taumb guards, too, to assist with the unloading. One burly fellow reached down, loosened my straps and hauled me to my feet. Then, I saw Toulm standing before us, a mocking grin on his face.

"It is done," the fellow taunted, and I knew at once that he spoke not only to us but to the hundreds packing the station. "I knew you, Adu, the minute I laid eyes on you, I, Toulm, common warrior of the mines, have trapped the great Adu where stalwart nobles have failed." His voice lifted above the roar that suddenly leaped from the multitude. "I demand my reward," he shrieked. "The rank of a third noble—promised by the Dedul, Most-wise, All—"

But the traitorous wretch was hurled aside. The fifty men, picked men of the Dedul's own guard, closed in.

CHAPTER IV

I STOOD numb with horror at the sudden change of fortune. But not Jack Wright.

With the quickness of thought, he swung on the guard who had pulled him up out of the chair, ripped the man's blade from his harness and waved it high.

"On guard!" he bellowed at the silent fifty. But they were already on guard.

Like a tidal wave they rolled in, in perfect formation. I looked for my rash comrade to go down with the first rush. But no. Rage lent power to that mighty arm; he cleared a space with one great sweep and cut deep into the first rank.

Then, like a leaf in a raging storm, I was thrown aside. For the main objective was Adu, all else could wait.

The fellow, Vuma, we never saw again. He had been tricked as we by Toulm whose scheme was so apparent now even to the rebellious speech in the chamber of the guard.

Back I went caught in the press of the crowd. Fingers of steel wrapped around my arm. A voice screamed in my ear.

"Back for your life! He has no chance!"

A taumb guard held me. A battle-mad throng shrieked taunts about my ears. I heard the din of crashing steel. Wright, still on his feet, weaved a curtain of death before him.

The grip on my arm tightened. With a growl I jerked free. Madly I threw myself forward but the massed humanity was like a steel wall; I could not gain an inch. Then, as I stood helpless, a mighty roar burst from the crowd. Wright was down. The fighting men swarmed over the spot.

The burly guard screamed again.

"They have him. They will not kill him—now. Come, while there is time."

I swung around. The fearless eyes were commanding. I shrugged; what could be lost? Without Wright, I would have no chance in Luvium. Better this man have the reward than Toulm. I nodded an assent.

"Follow, then," cried the guard.

He turned and lunged savagely into the pile-up at the head of the ramp leading down to the inner court. By sheer weight of his massive shoulders he beat his way downward. I followed, completely mystified. For he pushed by a dozen fighting men yet he made no outcry.

There was a frightful jam at the base of the incline but the guard drove through with ease. He pointed to the opposite wall.

"The city taumbs," he cried. "Hurry!"

The floor space was terraced, with the sections stepped up away from the center line of the court. We raced down past rows of faultless statuary and around squat, diamond-shaped booths, bucking always the endless stream of citizenry flowing against us. Except for the ever-changing hues and the costumes, it was a typical surface crowd. The women, in their long, flowing gowns of solid color and their towering coiffures, were like surface women, save that their faces were all the same cold white with lips red and full. A startling contrast.

Down we went, over the strange, sponge-like flooring to the center. Then, up from terrace to terrace towards the city taumbs. Still the people poured against us; people who were suddenly quiet. I looked back.

Directly across, on the landing platform we had just left, a man stood in the clear, head up and eyes flashing fire. Straps bound his arms. Behind

him stood the Dedul's guard, less than fifty now for Adu, The Stranger, had proven his worth.

"Hurry," cried the guard. "Already they seek you and your friends."

THE entrance ramp to these particular city taumbs was deserted. The other groaned under the weight of hundreds still pouring in. Apparently the news had traveled fast. Toulm, of course, had seen to that back in the first mine station.

Up we raced. There was a waist-high barrier at the top, a booth to the right. A man peered forth.

"Passes," he growled.

My guardian waved a metal plate aloft.

"Dedul's messengers," he grunted. "Open."

"But this fellow?" A hand pointed sternly at me.

I made a brilliant recovery.

"I lost mine," I shouted, "in the crowd."

These were my first words to a citizen of this fast-moving nation. Disastrous words. For in the excitement I spoke English!

"Mother of rock!" screamed the pass-inspector, almost falling out of his booth. "What ails this man? Guards, attention!"

The man at my side roared with anger.

"Jump!" he bellowed.

Together we leaped. The toe of my sandal hooked the top bar. Over I went on my face. I was up in a second wild with rage and chagrin. Three guards were upon us.

I struck out like a mad-man. Crack! A perfect hit. The man dropped like a log, his blade skidding along the platform. I snatched out my automatic and as quickly jammed it back. Six shots against an army! Six shots

—better to save them for the end. With a growl I leaped forward and caught the sword before it went over. Then, I whirled to help my rescuer stem the tide. He needed no help.

There are swordsmen and swordsmen. I had thought Toulm an ace. He was but a blundering clod compared to this clever giant. Even as I turned, one of the guards was somersaulting over the railing into the screaming masses below. The last of the trio backed with a howl of rage. One step, and two. My new-found friend darted in. His blade whined through a blurring arc, crashed aside the upraised sword and cut through the glittering helmet like so much butter.

I gasped as the victor whirled. His face was pitiless.

"The cars," he bellowed. "Take the first in the line."

We dashed down the platform, passing the long stream of empty chairs. So great had been this unexpected influx to Zemd's Mines that the first stood just outside the bore. I leaped for the cushions and glanced behind. Another taumb guard was nearly upon us. A squad of fighting men were already piling over the barrier.

"On guard," I cried to my comrade. He was wedged between two chairs apparently coupling them up. He straightened, fumbling at his harness; his back to the danger.

"Rock!" he growled. "I am caught."

Instantly, I sprang forth, blade in hand. The fellow, already cutting for Toulm, stopped up. Off balance, he swung wildly. I ducked, stepped in fast. My point came away red. Even as the man fell, my comrade tore himself loose.

"To the chairs!" he grunted.

Together we leaped, strapped ourselves in. The squad was coming up

fast. An unseen horn was blatting a warning:

"Stop them; stop them. One is affiliated with Adu. All taumb stations prepare to intercept—"

A breath-taking leap and sudden quiet. We were away into the semi-darkened tube. Free—until we attempted to land somewhere in the city.

The man behind was driving. With his tiny gear shift, he sent our silent, hanging chairs from rail to rail. Third speed was unbelievable. The soft lights of the one-way passage were spaced far apart, yet so fast did we move that they appeared as one unbroken line.

I turned. The taumb guard was grinning.

"Fortune smiles," he said above the whistling of the wind. "But what was that insane cackle you made at the guard?"

"My native tongue," I growled. "I forgot."

Twice I repeated this statement before my friend understood.

"By the blade!" he grumbled, "your accent is worse than Adu's. I can hardly make you out."

"Adu! Then you knew him?"

The man's eyes held a merry twinkle.

"Perhaps," he said. "But you?"

"I am his friend. I came through the Mystic Bore from the surface."

He laughed. "That I could guess. Your skin; your stumbling speech. You two are like brothers." He paused, glanced right and left as though fearful someone might hear. "I am the first man ever to see Adu," he added simply. "We were prisoners in the same cell. We led the revolt against Baku. I am named Latvu, The Cheerful."

THERE was a shout from behind. Latvu, if it was he, turned with a scowl. Fifty feet back was a racing train bristling with fighting men. My heart sank.

"The end?" I asked.

The Cheerful shook his head. "They can come no closer. All speeds are the same. They may follow us when we switch but unless they picked my station at the start, they can not enter. The automatic controls do not permit a change of destination once the car has embarked."

Long we drove forward with the ominous train ever at our heels. Other cars joined the stream. Ingenious controls guarded the switches. Once our speed was slackened to let a car of two chairs dash in from the middle lane on our left. From then to the end we trailed this two-chair barely ten feet behind. Grim white faces turned continually. Apparently the city was well informed.

We whistled by many slower moving cars on the first and second rails. The slowest lane traffic far to our left was but a blur against the shadowy walls of the passage. But glistening blades could be seen in the light of the station entrances we passed.

"Clever devils," cried Latvu. "They are filling up rail number one. When we switch over, someone is bound to be near. Our destination will be known." He laughed aloud. "No matter. It is one place in all Luvium where we are safe. But keep low. When they see us slipping away they may use the rifle."

When we switched, the train of warriors behind did likewise. So did the other cabs filled with the curious onlookers. From third to second, and second to first, they followed. There was a frightful jam at the cross-

overs; a lessening of speed that hurled us forward on our safety metal.

Then we were gone, plunging into utter blackness. A giddy drop and silence. I felt Latvu's hand upon my shoulder.

"Say nothing," he whispered, "but follow me. Hold to my trappings."

Breathless, I stumbled to the platform, fumbled for a grip. Then we struck out through the darkness, rapidly, for the man seemed to know the way.

Minutes passed. Then, The Cheerful pulled up short. I heard a door-lock click aside. A voice cracked out of the night, a full, rich voice.

"Welcome, men, to the Temple of the Gods. Follow the mystic line to the upper halls of worship. You are in darkness for mortal man is not yet born who is fit to look upon the marvels attending the Temple."

There was more, much more. The voice seemed to tag our heels. The mystic line, a soft red streak, sprang up out of nowhere and kept always before our faces.

Ramps led us upward. The dark corridor, although partly lightened by the three-foot, suspended line of light, disclosed nothing. We moved as though through space. The thumping of our sandals echoed hollowly over steel.

Then I sensed movement, saw the dim outline of chairs passing before us in a steady stream. Latvu broke the silence.

"A moving passage," he whispered. "Laid in sections. Step from one to the other and seat yourself on the chairs."

This I did. There were three floor areas each geared faster than its neighbor. The fourth, carrying the rests, slipped along rapidly. The mystic line had vanished.

"The Temple of the Gods," breathed Latvu. "No man may enter only for worship. His thoughts are read at the entrance. If he has other reasons, that red line turns and stabs him through."

"But we—" I began.

The man was chuckling. "There is much in the Temple that Baku, its builder, has forgotten. Not for years has that little line struck to kill. But its supernatural powers are still respected. We will not be touched while we remain within these walls."

"And after that?"

"There is no after. Plans have been made. Baku is doomed. Ever since that fatal hour when Zemd and his knaves struck me down with the new paralytic ray—the same ray with which Baku beat back the invaders from Luva—and since Adu was locked in the mystic bore, I have been working. Once we struck with force at the Dedul. We failed. Now we strike secretly at the next period of public worship. Adu will live till then—but come!"

Far ahead, apparently in thin air, flashed a meaningless scroll.

"We leave the chairs," breathed Latvu. "We go to the hall of the God of Radium. Do as I do and say nothing. There are lesser priests abroad who know the secrets of the red line."

We left the sliding floor and plunged into the gloom of a long winding passage. Gradually the curtain lifted. Soft lights crept into being; blue lights, weird and depressing. Then a small circular room—the ceiling of which was lost in the shadows above.

A chill blue dusk spread thick over all. Barely discernible was the many-armed idol in a niche back against the farther wall. A grotesque creature, ten foot high.

Even as we entered, the baleful eyes burst into a vivid green.

"Hurry," whispered Latvu.

And then I saw. A panel in the huge paunch was slowly slipping back.

"Hurry!" whispered The Cheerful.

I heard as if from a distance. Without warning a great weight had dropped upon me, I could not move my feet. Latvu, the idol—even the door to safety was fading in a mist. I tried to cry out but my voice was gone.

"The ray!" cried Latvu, looking back from the panel.

But I already knew.

CHAPTER V

THERE was a hoarse shout from behind. I could not turn; could only stare at the cloudy figure of Latvu. He was turning slowly, as if in a dream. They had chained him too.

But no! As if the effort was torture itself, he struggled one step forward and fell like a pillar, straight into the yawning paunch of the idol. Then, somehow, I knew the panel had closed, snapped shut a second before a hooded, robed apparition danced before my eyes.

That much I saw before sight fled entirely. And consciousness. For this was a three-point ray. It almost stole my mind.

I woke slowly. Every nerve, every fiber in my body seemed on fire. Through my eyes, red-rimmed and bleary, came a belated rush of pictures that crowded one upon the other with despairing rapidity. All that had happened, since the demoniacal priests of the Temple had caught me with their ray, passed in review.

I was being carried back to safety from the doorway through which Latvu had escaped. Three priests bore

me back through the passage to the moving chairs. The guardian streak came once more, this time in anger, twisting writhing, striking like a tiny red snake. But the priests only laughed. They had built against its force.

Miles of travel over the taumbs, and then—the Palace of Luvium, a structure of unforgettable beauty. Faultless marble of many different hues banked the endless halls, millions of precious stones, set in complicated geometrical designs, shimmered in the soft glow of the concealed radium lights. We passed room after room, bustling with humanity. I had, in my dream-state, only a fleeting picture of unapproachable grandeur. Then I stood before the Lord of the Underworld—Baku, the hideous Dedul.

He was a puny man, this ruler of giants; with face pitted and seared again and again by relentless time. His eyes, cruel beyond belief, seemed to burn through even the shield of power that held me prisoner.

The Dedul spoke from his suspended, movable throne high over the heads of his Council of Nobles. But I heard nothing. Zemd, the villain, was there lolling in the seat of first noble, at the head of the massive, horse-shoe shaped council table. A giant among giants, his thick lips curled in a mocking grin.

Other pictures came, pictures of many warriors and of massive elevators that dropped with sickening speed. Then rows of cells.

My sight cleared. Two men rocked before me, fists flailing. One was screaming curses through raw lips. The other, cool and silent, was putting every ounce of power behind his deadly blows. Twice the silent fellow struck hard body-blows, over the heart. The first man staggered and backed away.

But there was no escape. The closed room was scarcely ten feet in diameter. Against the wall he stood. A bronzed fist caught him hard on the point of the jaw. As he went down the victor turned.

"Wright!" I cried, leaping to my feet.

He evidenced no surprise.

"None other," he said curtly. "You have slept long since they brought you here. But I expected you hours before. How so?"

"They caught me with the ray. Ten feet more and I would have been free. Latvu escaped."

"Latvu!" Wright cried. "The Cheerful? He lives?"

I told him all, including the plan to strike secretly at Baku at the next period of worship.

"It is ten days away," mused Wright. "All Luvium gathers on the Dedul's order to pay homage to his Gods. Baku's Gods, born from a warped mind. Baku, himself, attends; his only public appearance."

"But man," he cried, "you have seen Latvu and yet have said nothing of Votta."

Votta! The girl in the case. The one reason Wright had braved almost certain death in order to return to Luvium. The finest, fairest woman below the surface or above—as he would have me believe. And I had met Latvu, one in all the city sure to know, and I had forgotten to ask!

There was a welcome interruption. The man Wright had felled was climbing to his feet. It was Toulm, our traitorous companion of Zemd's mines; undoubtedly, they had tricked him out of his reward. His battered face held a triumphant leer.

"Votta," he said thickly. "I heard you ask. She lives—but not for you. Listen: Zemd, angered at her per-

sistent refusal of his suit, cast her aside and she became a plaything of the mines." His laugh was mockery. "I was the last to have her. I gave her into the hands of the lesser priests of the Temple of the Gods. You may find her there, but I doubt if you—Mother of Rock!" he screamed.

For Wright had sprung upon him. Mighty hands darted to his throat and closed down fiercely. Futilely, the fellow beat upward at Wright's face, a face twisted with rage and despair. Slowly, the pressure increased. Toulm sank back, his eyes staring from their sockets. His arms dropped suddenly; with a shudder he went limp.

Wright flung the lifeless hulk aside and lurched to his feet. My heart leaped at what I saw. Hate, mad hate—killer's eyes that cried for blood.

"Perhaps," I offered for want of better, "he lied. You beat him with bare hands. He saw a way to inflict a deeper hurt."

"Enough!" snapped Wright. "Votta is dead. I live to avenge that death. And you?"

"To the end," I said grimly and meant every word.

FOR three days, days marked by the dimming of our single light, we sat in that hellish cell, pondering our fate. Guards came to drag Toulm away, and to bring us food and to purge our quarters. No word was said. Each time we were held powerless by the ray.

But the light had hardly come on the morning of the fourth day when the monotony was broken. A hidden screen in the ceiling cracked into life.

Baku, the Dedul, was looking down upon us, grinning his toothless grin, crouched low in the cushions of his wonder chair, only part of which was in range.

"You rested well?" he asked in a thin, rasping voice.

There was no answer. The eyes above us seemed to swell in their sunken sockets, to take on a shuddering quality of hate.

"Answer," he shrieked. "The Dedul speaks." His wasted fingers dug deep into the cushions, his thin little body, hidden in the shadows, jerked convulsively. A moment he raved but won no answer. Suddenly he was deadly calm.

"You have insulted your Dedul," he droned. "Another sin to your long list of crimes. You, Adu, once dared to lead force against the greatest of the great. Long ago I planned your punishment—but you escaped. Since that time I have improved upon it. This worthless clod," his burning eyes swept down upon me, "will share it. He talks like you, has the same crude mannerisms. It will be interesting to compare you two while my scientists work. You are interested in that work?"

He might have been speaking to a blank wall for all the answer he received. But he went on, knowing well that we listened.

"First," he said shrilly, "they will remove those organisms and appendages from your body that are secondary to life—eyes, ears, tongue and arms and legs, and the like. Great care will be taken and stimulants will be given, in order that you remain mentally alert throughout each operation. But," he grinned evilly, "that and ensuing experiments, while covering a great period of time, are incidental to the end. My project is to place your living brains and as much of the basic nervous system, both sensory and motor, as can be saved, into a synthetic body of my own design. Possibly both will inhabit the same body; it may be

possible to graft your brains to an entirely new nerve system. It will be a marvelous experiment, offering an endless field for research through the years. Even you can readily grasp the possibilities, can you not?"

We could! Long after the hateful figure had faded from the screen, we sat stunned with the horror of it all. And the pictures that came to mind; frightful pictures that could easily show a reality. For these men were not of the surface; they were ages beyond it in many ways.

I could not help but think of those simple, little, high-school experiments I had once performed. Living frogs were used; the body slitted, laying bare the heart actions—the study of reflexes. Much more I remembered. And now! We would be the frogs. Over and over, that thought drove home.

It was Wright who saved us from madness. He leaped to his feet with a growl.

"Not for us," he growled. "This day we go free. We act when the guard arrives to purge our cell."

In the past three days, two warriors had come to spray our quarters with a nauseating liquid. One held us with the ray while the other worked. The same as when they brought us foods—the man-made nourishment of this buried world. But first must the door be opened for the paralytic force could not penetrate steel.

They came even as we talked. Three this time, and each held a tube. Though we placed ourselves at opposite sides of the cell we could not escape. We had hoped that one of us would be free long enough to strike down the guard. But we failed.

Two-point power was on, just strong enough to rob us of control.

Then two held the tubes while the third loosed the pungent spray. Two men! It was as though our thoughts had been read; our speech over-heard.

Speech! The tiny, rose-tinted light in the ceiling; the Tentav of the mines! I groaned inwardly. Of course, the light was wired; these were the cells of Baku. No doubt watchers covered our every move; jotted down each whisper. For Adu was no ordinary prisoner.

As we stood helpless, a fourth man strode briskly into the cell. He was a giant among giants, broad of shoulder and big of hand. Great flashing gems left not an inch of his harness uncovered, and the design, etched across the front, was vastly more complicated than that of the three warriors who snapped erect the instant of his entrance.

The huge fellow glanced up at the light.

"Cut!" he snarled, and I knew then he spoke to watching guards.

I had a glimpse of the face. Proud and cruel it was and twisted with fury. He turned towards Wright. Only for an instant did the jaw sag and the eyes go wide. Then, once more, he was his arrogant self. There was something tantalizingly familiar about the man. Jack Wright put it in words.

"Zemd!" he whispered thickly.

Zemd! Of course, arch villain of the other days. He who had torn Votta, the girl, from Wright's arms and locked him forever from Luvium.

"Release the prisoners!"

THE voice came from the doorway out of my vision. A voice I remembered. Latvu, The Cheerful. Slowly, the two guards dropped their weapons, and life came slowly back. Wright was staring at the doorway, at Latvu who stood cold of eye, a

radium rifle trained squarely on Zemd's mighty back.

"Latvu," said Wright. He stopped to steady his voice. Then, evenly, in the quiet greeting of Luvium: "How shines your light?"

"Brilliant," replied the great warrior as casually.

It was over. Warriors of Luvium waste no time in idle sentiment. Here, two men closer than brothers during Wright's first visit to the city, met for the first time in two years. One had done the impossible — stolen the mighty Zemd, first noble of the nation, from under the eyes of his watchful guards, forced him through the city to the cells beneath Baku's own palace to save the life of his friend. Yet though Wright knew, he spoke as a warrior speaks. What he thought was locked in his heart.

"We must hurry," The Cheerful said calmly. "I doubt if the knaves behind the light obeyed this man's command. Perhaps they watch even now."

I stepped to the door but Wright made no move. His eyes, bitter beyond comprehension, were fastened on the noble. Zemd stared back unflinchingly, his face unchanged.

"You are fools," he said. "Latvu has done the impossible. Had I known his aim, we would never have come this far. But you go no further. You could not take ten unmolested steps without me on the return."

Latvu spoke slowly. "But you will return."

"Never. Before I help Adu gain the city, I will die."

Somehow, I knew he spoke the truth. Men of Luvium have no fear; their language does not even hold the word. They are fighting men and life is cheap. Even a first noble can be replaced.

This Wright knew. Never moving his eyes, he gave the order.

"Shut the door, Latvu."

The door slid so silently. Then:

"Tie these carrion. But leave Zemd untouched."

Wonderingly we complied. The three men bearing the crest of the House of Baku, lay bound and gagged, their tubes and blades confiscated.

Wright took up one of the short swords and jerked his thumb at the blade Zemd carried at his side.

"Draw!" he snapped in a voice edged with ice. "We settle an old score. You prefer death, Zemd; you shall have death."

The giant drew his steel, a grim smile playing across his lips.

"And if I win?" he asked mockingly.

"You will bargain with Latvu and Tuva, The Silent," Wright indicated me as "Tuva, The Silent," for your freedom. Their lives mean little to you. All Tuva asks is to be placed unharmed within the Mystic Bore. Latvu, however, may ask more.

"Now, on guard, fellow; you die for the hell you gave Votta."

The first mad skirmish was almost the end. Wright, unleashing a fury that had smoldered for two long years, threw caution to the winds. He forgot his guard. His cuts and slashes would have shamed a novice. He left an opening, a dozen openings, which Zemd, falling back, could not fail to see. This fearless noble, fiend though he was, could handle the blade. And he fought not as a cornered rat, but with a finesse and ease that was wondrous to see.

Twice, Zemd drove through the glaring openings. Twice, his tip drew blood. Once on the shoulder, once on the arm. Wright checked his rush just in time. The play shifted suddenly.

Zemd became the aggressor. Like a streak of light his sword flashed before the grim-faced prisoner. He feinted for the legs and throat, but Wright followed well. Slowly, he built up a guard and held it. Latvu, at my side grunted with relief.

Seconds they battled at par, neither yielding an inch. Steel smote steel with a din that was deafening in the little cell. Then Wright began to weave, a boxer's weave. Zemd stood like a stone wall, suddenly on the defensive. This new attack brought a scowl to his glistening brow.

Strange, this bit of play. Men of Luvium fought erect, balanced on the balls of their feet. This style was faulty. To his practiced eye, there were openings as wide as the passage door. Yet when he lunged they were gone.

His frown deepened. His cuts grew fiercer. Once he drove for a wide open body spot: Everything was behind the thrust. Yet somehow he missed, and Wright, bobbing back, nicked his balance arm.

Zemd leaped away with a grunt of surprise. Again Wright led him on with a body weave, to score again as the noble missed badly. This time to the cheek, Zemd backed fast to the wall, his face streaming red. Wright pressed him hard.

Twice more he scored; the opposite cheek and arm.

Latvu was first to guess his purpose.

"By my blade!" he swore. "Cutting him to pieces. Rock! but I thought Adu had met his master."

Zemd, too, read the answer. He took two nasty cuts about the knees before the haughty cloud slipped from his face. A look of desperation replaced it. His play grew more daring. He was staking all on one mad plunge. Almost he won.

His blade sang through a blurring arc. The flat side caught Wright's helmet squarely on the side. A stunning blow. Wright reeled aside. His sandal struck one of the three bound guards stretched prone along the circular wall. He rocked for a second fighting for balance.

Zemd saw the opening and leaped in cat-like.

"To the death!" he roared and cut straight for Wright's unprotected throat.

CHAPTER VI

BUT one of the guards saved the day. The crafty fellow, thinking to aid the first noble, flung his trussed knees hard against Wright's legs. Off balance, Wright went down at the very instant Zemd's steel went flashing harmlessly over his helmet.

The great Adu could have ended it there, striking up from below, yet, true warrior that he was, he leaped to his feet and waited till Zemd had swung away from the wall, where his rush had carried him, and rebuilt his guard.

Once more Wright struck. Down came his blade. Zemd cried out as his steel was crashed aside. The razor-edged sword caught him squarely at the base of his helmet. His cry faded to a rasping gurgle and Zemd, First Noble of Luvium and mighty warrior, died as a warrior dies.

The victor dashed the back of his hand across his eyes and sheathed his blade. Latvu paid him homage.

"The best I ever saw," he grunted. "A finish that will live as long as Luvium stands." Then, curtly: "But already we have tarried too long."

Wright was grim. "It had to be. It was written that this should happen—even though Baku and his butchers wait to carve us to bits. I would have

demanded that you two seek safety before it began, had I not known it would have been a waste of words. Now, if we die, we die together."

He included me, as though I, too, had become part of Luvium, a warrior with a fighting heart, who knew no fear—who could die without a whimper. I asked no greater honor.

Latvu was already at work. "Hurry," he ordered. "Even before we reached the cell, I knew Zemd would never return. I had the greatest of trouble masking my secret. Zemd thought it was only rebellion; that I, fanatic in the cause, wished to reach the cells to release an important ring-leader. If he had known my quest was to free Adu, he would have died on the streets where I found him." He thrust a radium rifle into my hands. "Hold these three guards," he commanded, "while I strip them of harness. Adu, remove Zemd's trappings. He will need them no longer."

It was done. The docile guards, hearts still afire over a duel that would live through the ages, were bound again. I stood adorned in the trappings of a Dedul guard; Adu the same. Latvu stood, a proud figure, strapped as First Noble of Luvium.

"It will not work," said Wright with a shake of his head.

The Cheerful agreed. "Of course. Who in all the city does not know Zemd, the Dedul's pawn. But look—this will do the trick."

He took the point of his sword and pried jewel after jewel from the weird design sketched across the front. There was a reason for altering the pattern.

"Look," he said at length. "You can read that?"

Wright could. "Baku's follower: rank, fourth noble; first in command of the 61st squad on duty in the low-

est cells." He grinned. "Excellent, unless we meet the man himself."

"It is almost impossible. The fellow will be on duty three floors below. We go up, to the main taumb station. Baku's men may pass unquestioned through most of the palace. Our trouble will be in leaving the station without an order. But that is far ahead. Come."

He swung the door and peered cautiously into the passage. It was deserted. Boldly we marched forth. Adu and I carried rifles as well as blades. The paralytic tubes dangled at our belts and, once more, hidden from all eyes, I felt the hardness of Wright's .38 where it rested in its improvised holster of straps. Yet none might tell in the dim light of the lower passages, that aught but a fourth noble and his guards strode the steel passageway.

Latvu hesitated at the first intersection. Two ramps led upward.

"The left leads to the hoist," he remarked; "the right connects the floors. We are thirty floors below the station. Shall we walk or ride?"

"Walk," said Wright. "I fear more people will be in the elevator." He stopped, lines crept to his face. It was as though he wrestled with a cruel hurt. "Latvu," he said slowly. "I have not asked. But Votta—"

The Cheerful looked up fearlessly. "Votta," he repeated, "The Beauteous? Then you have not forgotten?"

"Forgotten! If you knew—but no matter. Toulm told me a little. I would hear the rest."

There was a peculiar light in Latvu's eyes. It turned me cold with dread. I sensed what was coming.

"Wait," I broke in hurriedly. "If we are watched, will not guards be near at hand? Action now; talk later—when Adu is stronger," I ended lamely.

Both men shrugged. And tensed. Together we raced for the left-hand ramp. For the dull thud of marching feet came plainly from the right. Half way up we slowed our pace. The men coming down were nearly in sight. Across the passage came an excited voice.

"Then Zemd entered," the fellow was saying: "he spoke 'cut' to the light but he did not snap his fingers. Of course, we still watched. A fellow with the rifle came through the door. It was neat . . . And the battle—Adu and Zemd! Rock! but man never saw such play. It will be history. Even old Vutav was so enthralled he forgot the order—"

THE squad was down, marching towards the cell we had just left. The voice faded and died out. We stood at the head of the ramp. To the right and left were elevator doors, fully thirty feet across.

"We must ride," whispered The Cheerful. "As soon as they find us gone, they will begin searching every level through the lights." He stared at a blue scrawl that flashed over the door to his left. "This one," he grunted. "It is below us. Stand here and be ready with your steel."

Almost at once the barrier slid aside. We stepped in and were on the way up, at giddy speed.

The hoist could have held a hundred with ease. The twenty-five warriors on board were sprinkled about in twos and threes. We stood at the door, just out of range of the automatic controls, ever alert. Stops were many. Guards and nobles streamed in and out. But fortune still smiled. Even to the thirty floor level and along the moving chairs to the main taumb station.

There, we drifted carelessly with

the throng, up the center ramp. There seemed to be no undue excitement. Taumb guards, leisurely directing passengers to the cars, did little more than glance at the passes that were proffered them. There were no booths here. The letter of the law demanded that each pass be scanned minutely by two guards while the rider stood beside his cab. This to prevent the dropping of plates over the railing to others as sometimes happened with entrance booths.

But as always, on the surface or below, there are some who are lax. We delayed purposely to pick a pair to suit our needs. We timed our approach nicely. A train of three chairs was waiting.

"The espionage system," snapped Latvu to the sleepy-eyed attendants. He made a meaningless gesture.

"Your passes?" said one without enthusiasm.

"This is our pass." Again The Cheerful made the sign. "Have you not heard?"

Wright and I were already seated. Latvu was edging in.

"I have not heard," replied the fellow. His voice was no longer lifeless. "But I have heard of the escape of Adu and his companion and one other. The other wears Zemd's harness. He made clever changes but he forgot the blue stone of the First Noble on the helmet . . . Guard!" he suddenly screamed.

His blade appeared like magic. Latvu, taken utterly by surprise, could only gasp as the point pressed deep against his waist. I fumbled at my belt cursing myself for strapping it so tightly. We would be too late.

Latvu took the gamble. He twisted aside at the same time aiming a crushing blow squarely at the mocking face before him.

A fatal move. The guard pivoted with him. His head went down, the fist whistled harmlessly by. Then he struck, hard and low. I cried out in horror as the point drank deep. Latvu staggered back, his face twisted with pain.

"Done," he gasped. "Flee for your lives. The Temple."

He teetered wildly on the edge of the platform and then went over, landing in a heap on the floor of his cab.

I saw Wright reach for the dial, but they were upon us. The best in Luvium, grim and silent. Belt loosened I sprang to my feet, tugging at my pistol. It caught in the straps. A sword crashed against my helmet, another seared my cheek. With a curse, I dragged out my blade. Wright too was battling fiercely.

A sea of steel flowed jerkily before us, above us. Twice more I was touched. Once I broke through that frightful wall of swords and felt my steel strike home.

But the odds were too great. By sheer weight of numbers they bore us down. Something struck hard against my helmet. I felt a point scream past my face as I went to my knees. Blood streamed from a half dozen cuts on my arms. My heart sank as I struggled erect. Wright, in the cab ahead, was down. A mocking guard stood with upraised blade. Beyond them, I saw a bloody figure arise. Latvu, his eyes shot with pain. But he thrust, straight and true, and Wright's assailant toppled slowly over the side.

I saw no more. Blades leaped down at me, beating a ringing tattoo against my helmet. Madly I battled. I picked out a stoic face above and swung with all my might. The face was gone. I struck again through a red haze and my point shivered to bits against one of the chair supports.

WITH a growl I flung the useless hilt as hard as I could. It clattered harmlessly against the metal wall of a passage. Men, station and lights were gone!

A grim chuckle rose from the front chair above the cries of rage that were fading into the distance behind. A pain-racked countenance was staring back at me, at Wright who was slowly dragging himself erect, the stump of a sword clutched in his hand. I steadied myself against the chair arm as we rocketed through a switch into the main taumb bore.

"Free," gasped Latvu. "I set the pointer. To the Temple." His eyes went blank, his head dropped and he fell back out of sight.

We stood again, three blood-drenched warriors, in the Hall of Radium before the green-eyed, many-armed monstrosity who leered at us from the shadows of the wall. Behind us stretched a trail of death. A half-dozen lesser priests, answering the call, had attempted to stem the tide. But Wright and I burdened by our stricken comrade as we were, were more than a match for their puny blades. Grimly we had hacked our way, guided by the stout-hearted Latvu, to win through.

In the chairs we had bandaged his frightful wound as best we could with strips torn from our under-garb. Yet twice he collapsed.

Now, The Cheerful stood before us, scorning aid, staring with reddened eyes at the idol. I felt light-headed from the loss of blood. Wright, of the three, had suffered least. Yet not even he had come through unscathed.

"A thought picture," Latvu winced, clutching his torn side. "I dare not disclose the secret. Look, it opens!"

The panel was swinging, slowly.

Without hesitation we staggered in, heard it click behind us.

The light was poor. We stood facing a half-circle wall, pierced by twenty passages.

"Nineteen of those lanes lead to death," explained Latvu, "for this section of the Temple beneath the floor of the main hall, is guarded well. The true pass is the eighth from the left. Three men in all Luvium, beside us, know that secret."

"Who are the three?" Wright asked.

"A lesser priest; and the master of these lanes of mystery; and one other." Though he said nothing his eyes mirrored the pain he endured. "I will say no more. May your surprise be as great as mine when you know."

We entered the passage. Almost at once it doubled back. And branched.

"Left," whispered Latvu. "Always left. There are many of these turns and intersections . . . Let us stop. I am weary."

While we rested, the obvious thought struck home. Votta, the girl! Toulm's words came back: "I gave her into the hands of the lesser priests." Mentally I raced ahead. She had escaped, found this secret within secrets. She was the Master, plotting single-handed against the ruling forces—Baku and Zemd, who had made her life a Hell.

I thought no more. A wild shriek crashed through my consciousness. From a gloomy passage to our right a ghastly figure sprang full upon us.

CHAPTER VII

"BAKU!"

I think I screamed the word aloud. The wrinkled devil stood before us, breathing hard, crouched under the weight of countless years.

"Baku!" It was Wright this time, staring hard at the withered being.

Latvu leaned against the wall grim of eye.

"This," he said, "is the Master."

For a long moment there was silence, broken only by the labored breathing of the man before us. Then, thin lips moved over toothless gums. A wavering voice came faintly.

"I hurried," he gasped. "A trap. Forty paces ahead—a ray of death. I set it this morning forgetting that The Cheerful might return."

Impossible; Dumbly, I stared at the man. I looked in vain for the arrogant flash in those wicked eyes. It was gone; they were almost kind.

Suddenly Latvu chuckled weakly.

"You are surprised?" he asked.

He read the answer in our faces.

"So was I," he said evenly. "It took records to convince me that this was not Baku. None living in all Luvium knows that Baku has a brother. This is he, Master of the mysteries of the Temple of the Gods. By name, Domia, The Ancient."

While we stumbled along the twisting passage, setting our pace to that of the rapidly failing Latvu, Domia told us his brief story. And as he spoke the tainted exterior was forgotten. We saw only a strong mind and sorrow that only wasted years can bring.

"I am the Dedul's brother," he said. "He was strong; I was weak. All my life I have been before his will, as slave to his false Gods."

He paused to turn aside the death ray angling across the pass.

"Luvium's present religion, you know," he continued as we passed on safely. "It is idol worship; homage to the metals that further life. Baku's creed."

Wright had found his tongue. "The speaking idol," he said rapidly, "the giant talking god—God of Rock—who stands in the center of the Temple. You are the answer."

The patriarch clenched his tiny fists. His voice was bitter.

"I am God. I am the voice of mystery that speaks each worship day to the people. Long have I cried aloud the praises of my brother, so that he might continue his worthless reign. It will soon be over. The inexplicable power he has held over me from the first is gone. Mentally he is dying. Not for a warrior's lifetime has he crept through this bore with speeches to read to the waiting throngs—through the mouth of the Rock God."

We were at the quarters of this strange man. The room was large and in excellent order. Panel after panel of the familiar typewriter controls, bordered the walls and stood in even rows across the floor.

One other was there, the lesser priest, drawn from the ranks in the distant past. His mind, unlike his master's, had retreated before the years.

"To-morrow," he muttered as he drew chairs and a cot for Latvu from the one vacant floor space, "Baku dies. Long have I waited the day. He dies—dies—"

He shuffled away still mumbling words of hate to return with healing salves and bandages. Domia, The Ancient, brought skillful fingers into play on Latvu's side.

"He will live," he said at length. "He suffers now from loss of blood. The broken ribs will heal."

Then we rested. My mad conclusion had been shattered. "Three men know the secret"—the lesser priest; Baku, the Dedul; and Domia, Master of the Temple. These, then were the three.

It all happened so quickly I was left stunned. The Ancient rose and made a sign. The door to his sleeping chamber slid aside. Someone stood in the entrance; a girl, radiantly beautiful, gowned in purple robes.

"Adu," she said and her voice was wonderously soft. "You have not forgotten?"

Slowly my friend rose.

"Votta," he breathed and his eyes shone with a light that touched the heart of every man present. For it was she. The one girl in two worlds for Wright. Votta, The Beauteous—tall and supple, bearing herself as should a daughter of a noble.

Tenderly, Wright took her in his arms and kissed her before us all. Then, he turned.

"My own," he said simply.

The girl placed her hand in his.

"And mine," she whispered.

"We see," returned the men, even to the doddering priest at work upon a panel far back in the room.

It was done. From thence on, no man might speak of love to this woman. She had made her choice before the world, and the world had "seen." A faultless ceremony. The placing of a jade bracelet on her wrist, that would come later, was incidental to the fact.

INTRODUCTIONS were quickly over. Seated again, we took up the matter at hand. There was no light talk, no banter; men of Luvium speak only when they have something to say. Emotions receive no idle play.

Wright spoke tersely on what had gone before, even to the death of Zemd. He asked no questions but Votta explained.

"I refused the hand of Zemd," she said quietly, and there was nothing of the anguish she must have suffered

in her words. "In rage, he placed me secretly in the hands of the lesser priests. Toulm lies; I was never in the mines. Duva, here," she glanced behind at Domia's helper. "Duva found me. He was once a friend of my father. He took me at once to Domia. Here I have lived waiting Baku's death so I might return to the city. Through Domia, I reached Latvu."

Three men—Votta was a woman.

"And to-morrow he dies," said The Ancient slowly, speaking of Baku. "All is in readiness. Come, I will show you how."

He led us from panel to panel explaining as he went. "Here," he pointed, "I speak to those entering the Temple through the taumbs. Only on special occasions do I speak direct. Usually it is a recording, even to the guiding line. And here," he stopped before a series of panels, "are the warning instruments. They told me that Latvu had entered and that I had forgotten to shield the ray. It is a visible bit of radium, focused and stepped up twenty-point. It can only be controlled by hand and periodically needs replacing."

Three boards down, a green light flared.

"The God of Radium," Domia cried. "The entrance. Quick!"

He was at the board. Skinny fingers raced skillfully over the controls. A screen similiar to the Tentav sprang to life.

We looked down upon three hooded priests tapping gently at the paunch of the idol.

"We see through the eyes," whispered Domia. "All idols are wired in this way. I can travel to every God in the Temple, see all, through their eyes. And speak. Listen."

He touched a switch, and spoke at the picture. Thin and high his voice

was, but it came back, a split-second echo, deep and sonorous through the screen.

"Slaves of mine," said The Ancient slowly, "what means this desecration? Away, before I send the line of death."

The men stood erect. We could not see their faces but the voice of the man who answered was packed with hate.

"Old fool," the priest answered, seemingly to face us squarely, "someday we will find your dingy cell. Send your ray, we are ready."

The picture faded. Domia turned with a sigh.

"Thus is the religion of Baku. These fools, closer than any in Luvium, know the secret. Always are they tapping, striving to pierce my negotium—anything to find me. Once I could kill the rash ones with my red electronic stream, but long ago they devised a defense. But let them hunt; it will do no good. Only the thought picture can swing that panel, known only to Baku, myself and lately Latvu."

He moved on to a larger machine.

"This is the soul of the God of Rock," he said hatefully. "the mighty statue in the very center of the Temple. Through it I speak to the multitude—and to Baku, who comes in his suspended chair through an opening even I can not find. Often we converse, and I am convinced that that alone has kept the rabble true to Baku's Gods. The thinking class, of course, have never been won over. For that reason the Dedul maintains his impenetrable field of disorder banked around his chair . . . But look."

He played the controls. A giant screen, twenty feet across, came to life on the wall before us. Through the eyes of the idol we gazed in awe upon the main room of the Temple,

the largest chamber in all Luvium under one dome. Most of the idol was out of range but it was apparent that we looked down from at least a hundred and fifty feet above the base.

Supporting pillars of unbelievable thinness stretched like a forest of giant pencils before us, vanishing into the darkness above. Far in the distance, where the floor tilted upward, were the hidden seats.

And directly before our eyes, blotting out part of the picture, was a mighty stone hand, fully twenty feet in width, with palm up and fingers extended.

"Here," said The Ancient, "sits Baku intent on the lies I tell of his prowess. Watch him to-morrow, before he dies. You will see a strange thing. The God of his mind has stolen that mind. He has forgotten that I am the voice, he believes body and soul is his creation."

Like Frankenstein,* Baku had created a monster. The mighty intellect that had been strong enough to hold millions to his indomitable will, had bent before an obsession. A monomaniac, sane in his heartless manner, on affairs of state, but hopelessly mad on the subject of his Gods.

THE short night passed. There was little talk. Wright and Votta, as true Luviumians, kept their love locked in their hearts. Latvu was removed to a sleeping chamber, for it would be weeks before his torn side was healed. As for Domia, he broke the silence only to explain the mode of attack.

"It is simple," he said. "Long ago I felt Baku's hypnotic power weakening. I plotted his life. Twice, I tried

*A frequent error in literature is to cite Frankenstein as a monster. In Mrs. Shelly's novel it is Frankenstein who creates or forms the monster.

the rifle but his mystic field of disorder could not be pierced. Then, I went deeper.

"Two metal pillars in the main hall are in line with the massive idol hand. These I wired and insulated. That control," he pointed to a switch on the far wall, "will close a master switch. The greatest charge man has ever attempted to control will leap the gap. I estimate a play of one second before the pillars melt away. It seems impossible for man to build against such force. But," he smiled grimly, "if Baku has done the impossible and he lives through it, I will destroy his God. It is the least I can do.

"On the board I have placed a control that will sheer off the metal supports. The idol will fall to the right, just missing the first tier of seats. Then, before we die, I will destroy every God in the surrounding passages."

It was morning by Domia's three-handed signate watch. We ate the familiar synthetic foods fashioned from the elements of the rock, and were ready. Voice tests were made. Some one must deliver the opening ritual through the mouth of the God.

"I may not return in time," said Domia. "The generators, lying far below the Temple, must be stepped up separately. It is a delicate operation."

Wright's voice and mine qualified. But since my friend was needed at the guardian machines, which I could not operate, I was given the speech.

"Your voice is the right pitch," said The Ancient to me. "It does not need lowering. Thus, I may steal that much more voltage to add to my arc. We need only the vibra-filter to remove your accent. And now," he said with finality. "I go. If I do not return, remember: the instant Baku lands his flying chair upon the hand, someone

must throw the switch. Whosoever does the deed, does it for Luvium."

The lesser priest drew himself up. "It is settled," he growled, his eyes slits. "I throw the switch."

DOMIA, The Ancient, was gone.

We were at attention. I, in my chair before the controls and directly under the huge wall screen that would show us in detail how Baku died. The lesser priest was far back across the hall, his hand never an inch away from the death switch. And Jack Wright and Votta were treading firmly up and down the long lines of machines guarding the hidden rest. For no man could tell what move the crafty Dedul might make.

That we had twice fled for safety in his temple, he must know. Would his warped mentality connect us with his brother, whom he had seemingly forgotten during the years? Or would the power of his obsession override his mind, refusing to admit that his Gods were false?

The time drew near. I tested the controls for the last time, then brought in the picture through the eyes of the mighty God of Rock. There was the immense hand outstretched before us, palm up. Far below was the floor, bathed in a varying procession of oppressing blues. Off in the distance were the seats, in place now and already jammed with nobles from rank One to rank Eight. The lesser warriors, workers and their families and men of the mines were present through their televisors.

The thin lines of the three-handed watch crept close to their point intersection. I began my speech, every line memorized and every word in praise of the worthless Dedul—much the same speech that The Ancient had given countless times in the past. I

sang the praises of a super-man; I decreed endless life for him, but no greater wisdom. For that no man could ever have. My voice came back through the screen as perfect as voice could be. With it came the meaningless rumble of the great crowd.

And then—Baku!

Out of the somber blue he came, far over the floor, winging through the thin forest of pillars. He was crouched deep in the cushions of his flying chair, the secret of which only he knew. Not until he had swung once around the Rock God and come to rest on the extended palm, did I see the face.

But when I did, I screamed aloud in horror. Wide eyes stared back from the picture, eyes that had lost their sight. A stream of red trickled down the leathery cheek and I could even see the mottled lines where talon-like fingers had buried deep into his throat. The wasted form was sprawled in a grotesque heap.

I swung from the seat with a cry of warning.

"Hold," I shrieked, forgetting that my voice was blanketing the city. "This man is—"

But the lesser priest had closed the switch. He had seen the chair drop upon the hand; his cry echoed my own.

A hideous crackle pounded against my ears. I spun back to see a holocaust of flame. The picture was gone. In its place was a tremendous, flowing sheet of blue; leaping, writhing streamers of dazzling purple. For one blinding second it played, searing my eyes, filling my head with its snapping roar. Almost I felt the frightful heat, smelled the pungent odor this great arc created.

Then, it was gone. Through streaming eyes I saw the result. Chair, hand

and even part of the arm had been wiped into nothingness. Domia had planned well.

I staggered to my feet unmindful of the roar that broke through from the vast assembly out beyond.

"He was dead," I cried as I turned. "There was no need—"

I stopped. Across the room a charred figure was falling. A sickening odor stung my nostrils. The lesser priest! I felt a prickling tremor race through my body, a series of shocks, as if I stood near a high potential line on a damp day.

Wright stood just before me, blotting out my view of the door across the room. But I heard him cry:

"Domia! We won. But he was dead before we struck."

I heard his sharp intake of breath as he moved aside.

"God!" he whispered. It was not a prayer.

For there in the doorway stood a man, crouching under the weight of years, withered face gleaming with a strange light. A broad belt, void of ornamentation, was wrapped twice around his shrunken form. Domia, I thought—but the eyes told the story. Cruel eyes, bitter—burning with an inward flame. It was Baku!

CHAPTER VIII

"YOU are surprised," the devil cackled suddenly, as we stood frozen in our tracks. "You should not be. I can not die—you heard my God." His hideous laughter died. "The God," he whispered, "that told me of this outrage, who guided me to where Domia, The Ancient, tinkered with his machines of death. I killed the worthless clod. For you I have other plans—as I told you."

He moved forward, marching slow-

ly up the aisle of Tentavs that guarded Domia's retreat. Thin hands toyed with the belt of mystery.

A startling truth was apparent, now, in the stronger light. No part of his body touched that belt. He was cloaked even to the finger tips with a tight-fitting, transparent suit. As he neared the center of the room I could see wires, hundreds of hair-like fibers, emanating from the broad band around his body, weaving a thin-meshed cocoon some four feet on all sides. Here, was built the mystic field that the greatest scientists of Luvium could not fathom.

Some spoke wisely of the cancellation of electricities in the atoms of a certain gas of great density, with the resultant energy held from radiating away by the rim of the cocoon. Others claimed a field of positively charged atoms, an impenetrable barrier to the bombardment of ether waves of higher frequency than that of ultra-violet rays.

Whatever it was, it was there. Enemies of Baku had tried everything—the higher frequencies of the electro-magnetic spectrum, and of sound, with no results. Heavy metals could penetrate this field if driven at high speed. But these were stopped by the unknown solid comprising the weightless, flexible suit the Dedul wore over his trappings.

I watched him come, smug behind his curtain of safety. He was coming, not to kill but to bring something infinitely worse than death. The shock sensations were approaching alarming proportions.

With a snarl of rage, I dug beneath my harness. Up came the pistol that I had packed so far—and had saved for just such a moment as this. Treat us as frogs, would he! Inflict unthinkable torture, transform our physical

beings to ghastly, shapeless hulks—not now!

I pulled the trigger with a cry of triumph. Crash! There was a flash of red where the lead pellet plowed through the field. A line of red straight towards that leering face. The ping of the slug striking steel—and ricochetting harmlessly off. Frantically, I emptied the chamber. Six red flashes, six red lines. The man still stood—untouched.

But he had stopped, a mocking grin on his face.

"Explosives," the thin voice rasped. "Not for ages have we heard them in Luvium. Crude," he taunted. "I built against greater forces. Have you nothing better?"

Nothing better! And I had given my best. Back I staggered, crushed—beaten. Nothing better! Suddenly, I tensed, battling a tantalizing truth that was stirring in my mind. Not force, for Wright proved again the immunity of the man. From a point a dozen feet to my left, my friend drew a bead with his silent rifle. There was a crackling roar as the bullet struck. Baku stood for a second bathed in flaming red. Then a tongue of crimson, licked back along the invisible beam. Wright dropped the white-hot barrel with a cry of pain.

Then Baku did a strange thing. His eyes went up, the mockery fled from his face as he stared at the living scene on the wall. In range was part of the Rock God's body and the outstretched, mutilated arm.

"We are ready?" asked the Dedul. "They shall pay for this sacrilege?"

In a flash I understood. I whirled, spoke softly to the picture.

"Never!" I whispered, yet I knew my voice came ringing back from the screen, clear and full. "They are not for you. You are old. Too long have

I kept you in power; too long have I kept myself in power. Look, Baku, I kill myself. You would not dare to live—you could not live without me. When I die, you will die. Look!"

TOP controls chained the power that would sheer the supports from beneath the idol of rock. I played them all as fast as my fingers would move. Then, I stared as Baku was staring, as Wright and Votta and the millions in touch with the Temple were staring, but from a different angle, from the eyes of the God we saw. There was movement. The room tilted upward slowly; the forest of pillars wobbled and bent towards us. For a moment we hung motionless, the worship room with its silent thousands poised at a daring angle. Then floor and all came rushing up. The thin metal supports whistled by. The idol was falling between them.

There was a splintering crash as the extended arm was ripped away. Then, we saw it coming, a pillar we could not miss. Up, up—straight upon us raced the shimmering column. We struck it squarely. I had a brief glimpse of a near-by tier, of white faces peering stoically upward. Then, nothing—the eyes were out; our screen was blank.

I hurled myself around. Every Tentav in the room, save those beneath Baku's blanket of power, was flashing red, jarred into action by the frightful crash that we could not hear. But the Dedul!

He stood as I hoped he would stand, face twisted in unbelievable horror, staring fixedly at the wall behind him. He had witnessed the death of his God. In all his world there could be no greater loss. For he believed in that piece of rock. For decades the obsession had grown, ever strengthening

that particular synapse that made him mad on the subject of his God.

He was a madman now, wild with grief. He gibbered and shrieked, screaming for mercy before a blank wall, beating his chest with his shriveled hands.

Then, suddenly, he was rigid. It was a battle—a mental battle of unthinkable magnitude—sanity against an obsession. Nor was Baku by any means the first to suffer this strange mental disruption. Men have died because a simple obsession, like the fear of the dark, was driven too often through a certain neurone valve. And we know that one word can force people, obsessed with the unconquerable fear of high places, to hurl themselves to horrible deaths.

Baku had that word. But would his giant mind respond? Breathlessly, I watched his eyes, waiting for one flash of reason that would spell our doom. It never came. I saw stark fear, uncertainty, and then—conviction. Baku had heard his God cry death.

His hands darted to his waist. Tiny lines of blue leaped forth, beginning the tracing of a pattern in the space about him, outlining the wire cocoon.

The lines grew thicker. Tiny purple arcs slithered from wire to wire. A steady crackle drummed my ears; a pungent odor filled my nostrils. Baku, silent now and with hands stretched stiffly before him, was slumping to his knees. I saw the fall—but no more.

A blinding sheet of flame swirled up from where he had dropped. A giant hand seemed to slap against me, double me over the machine. The pressure drove the breath from my lungs. A terrific gale whistled by my ears, fleeing that holocaust of fire. I saw Wright flung bodily over two rows of Tentavs and slammed against the

wall, Votta, far to my left, was fighting desperately to keep her footing.

Then there was a blast that rocked the chamber; a glare that shot like a burning knife into my eyes; and heat that crinkled my skin. Then, merciful darkness.

LATER, in the little sleeping chamber just off the main room, with Wright and Latvu on hanging cots beside me, I spoke my mind.

"I claim my reward," I said tersely, shifting slightly to ease the sting of the burns beneath the tape. "I rid Luvium of its Dedul. Therefore, I will be king. This riotous pace will cease. Wars will end; I will contact with the surface, move the millions of Luvium to the land of the sun and bring their miracles of science to the surface race. And more—"

But Wright was laughing grimly.

"Wrong in every way. An exodus to the surface would be madness. In fact, ninety per cent of the people can not conceive of life on top of a whirling globe. Even the ten per cent that might submit to such a move could not live. Pathogenic bacteria, driven from this hot-house city centuries ago, would ravage their unprotected bodies in short order. Not for generations could they regulate their physical selves to withstand the rays of the sun and the constant temperature changes."

"Then, Dedul!" I repeated.

It was Latvu who answered.

"The Dedul," he said coldly, "was enthroned the instant Baku breathed his last. The ranking noble of the Council of Nobles is now the Dedul. As for peace," he scoffed. "Who asks for peace? What more could one wish for than to die with blade in hand?" The fire in his eyes faded. "Your

words bring to mind our illustrious scientists, who prattle endlessly of a time when wars will be forgotten, when we will be naught but giant brains rotting in dingy holes, thinking beautiful thoughts throughout all eternity. The same scientists," he added caustically, "who are now scratching their intelligent heads over all that remains of the chamber in which Baku died. No two agree as to the content of that mystic field. If you listen closely you will hear the wise ones theorize on everything from a rush of vastly charged protons to a release of pure energy."

I heard the voices, excited, angry voices from the room beyond, as the door slid aside, but they held no interest. For Votta, The Beauteous, fairest of two worlds, stood in the entrance.

"I bring news," she said quietly, her eyes seeing only Wright. "The Dedul orders you three to your posts in his personal guard as soon as you are able. You have been greatly honored."

Honored! To the fighting stalwarts of Luvium perhaps it was an honor. I turned to Wright.

"Your outfit," I asked; "they will return over the sands to Zandu?"

"Yes," he murmured. "That was my order. Why?"

I shrugged. "Our mission here is ended; our accounts are squared. And after all, this life is not ours. We belong to the sun, the night and day—to the surface. You, too, will return?"

There was no answer: he had not heard. I saw the reason. Votta, The Beauteous, tall, supple and proud, with eyes afire with love for that lucky man. That was the answer.

"Apparently," said Latvu dryly, "you return alone."

And he was right.

The Sword of Akalah

By J. LESLIE CHAMBERLAIN

This is quite a charming presentation of what we may suppose to have been a vision of the lost Atlantis, the great continent which was supposed by many to have disappeared under the waters of the ocean. A great sword of bronze plays its part in this story.

"I AM writing this in a mad-house . . . oh, I know it has a more euphonious name, Dr. Friedrich Von Arnstein's Sanitarium, but it is a mad-house, nevertheless. And here I have been incarcerated for the past thirteen years . . .," So ran the letter that my old buddy, Bill Carstairs, had in some way managed to have smuggled out of Dr. Von Arnstein's Sanitarium.

Poor old Bill! What memories his letter evoked. The day in Camp Lewis back in '17 when Bill, a green rookie, had come to my supply room and demanded a length of picket line for his horse. I was Supply Sergeant of the 316 M. P.'s in days when we tried to ride those wild horses without saddles. The saddles, I recall, arrived a month or so after the horses.

Then the gay times Bill and I had in Tacoma and Seattle, care-free nights before the actual horror of war closed in about us. The crossing of the Atlantic . . . the arrival in France. . . . The Argonne . . . and Bill with a *Croix de Guerre* for facing a machine-gun nest alone to rescue a wounded French Lieutenant. The Distinguished Service Cross also became his in time, besides two bullet wounds in his head.

So, after the Armistice, Bill returned to parade up Market St. in San Francisco with hundreds of his buddies,

gallant with his two medals for bravery and two wound stripes on his sleeve, marching to the playing of bands and the cheering of hysterically patriotic crowds, only to find a few days later that his old job at the chemical works had been taken by a slacker who had claimed exemption and was now holding down Bill's job somehow better than Bill could ever have done.

Bill Carstairs took his sixty dollars and bought some civilian clothes and paid his room-rent, a week in advance. He still had his memories of a soldier's work well done . . . and two medals. But you can't eat memories or medals! So Bill tightened his belt and spent the mornings looking for work and the afternoons, when it was difficult to see employers, he would go to the museum and sit amid the quiet and peace of ancient things and think, God knows what strange thoughts they were, of life in general, the fickleness of hero worship, the gratitude of Republics and just where a gas sergeant fitted into the civilian scheme of things.

One afternoon when the fog dripped from the eucalyptus trees, the chill dampness caused Bill Carstairs to appreciate the warmth of the museum. And perhaps it was this warmth, combined with the fact that the rooms were practically deserted, save for a drowsy attendant somewhere in the distance, that caused



And as she stood there she leaned on a great two-handed sword of bronze, so long that it reached nearly to her shoulders.

Bill to seat himself on the bench and doze.

He had been looking at a new addition to the strange things in the room, a sword half buried in a roughly hewn block of sandstone, enclosed in a new glass case.

The sword was made of bronze and evidently very ancient. It was a two-handed sword, with an enormous hilt and a decorated guard that curved slightly downwards. On the hilt were faintly discernible some strange characters. The scabbard was also of bronze and about half way down it seemed to emerge from its base of sandstone.

Curious, Bill read the typewritten card in the case. It stated that a party of scientists, dragging the sea-bottom in the vicinity of the Azores Islands in search of some clues as to the actual existence of the lost Island of Atlantis had, by chance caught this block of sandstone with their grappling hooks from the sea bottom and to their surprise, when it reached the deck, the hilt of the strange sword protruded from the rough stone.

They had taken away part of the sandstone to clearly show the sword and left enough so that the public might see how it was imbedded. Its age could only be vaguely guessed at, but it must have been enormous, and the description ended with the query, 'Could this have been an actual relic of the Lost Atlanteans?'

Bill's ideas of Atlantis were somewhat indefinite, gained mostly from the magazine supplements of the Sunday newspapers.

He told me afterwards, in his cell in the county jail, that he never had given much thought to Atlantis or its legends until that afternoon and even the first sight of The Sword aroused in him no particular interest.

As I said, Bill had come in out of

the fog and what with the warmth and quiet and the fact that he was tired from walking all the morning, he dozed on the bench with his back against a pillar.

Then he either dreamed the strangest dream a man ever had, or else out of the 'dim, dead past there leapt across countless centuries 'memories', so real and vivid, that Bill Carstairs never was the same man again.

As he dozed, he said, he became conscious of strange surroundings, a great vaulted hall with a high groined ceiling. He was seated on a beautifully carved wooden bench and dressed in a loose fitting, white woolen robe, "something like a long nightgown" said Bill. About his waist was a broad belt of square golden links with a large buckle set with a star sapphire. In the room with him were several other men similarly attired, and one was industriously shaving Bill's head. Somehow, Bill knew that this was part of some priestly rite, nor did this appear at all strange to him, for it seemed that he had long looked forward to this day.

Also from this moment he seemed to forget that he was Bill Carstairs and became conscious only that he was Tim-Ur, a noble and one of the lesser priests of the Temple of the Greek God Poseidon, called Neptune by us.

When they had shaved his head the High Priest, a venerable man with a long white beard, came forward and as Tim-Ur knelt before him, the High Priest placed upon his head a close fitting metal wig, soft and flexible, a wig of golden curls and each hair made from a stand of pure gold.

Then to the clash of cymbals and the fanfare of trumpets, Tim-Ur was escorted into the Temple. Since a boy he had been countless times in the Temple but always on the outside of the

marble railing that separated the Priests from the People.

Now, a newly ordained servant of the Gods, he was at last inside the Sacred Railing. Before him loomed the high Altar with its marvelously life-like statue of Poseidon driving his white horses up out of the foam of the Sea.

To the left was the Scimitar of the Sun, a strange thing that had always fascinated Tim-Ur. It was a crescent of gleaming silver metal that swung back and forth on a shining rod, pivotted high up in the dark recesses of the Temple roof. Swinging back and forth, ceaselessly, never stopping, wearing deeply into its agate bearings, as long as the memory of the priest of the Temple could go it had swung, catching the first rays of the morning Sun and its last rays at night, back and forth, back and forth . . . Motion Perpetual!

And on the right was the Throne of the Goddess—the Goddess Akalah. The people worshipped her as divine, but Tim-Ur knew she was mortal, an Oracle who spoke the words the Priests wished her to speak, but to the populace a Goddess is a Goddess, if the Priests said so, and most of the wealth of the Temple came as offerings at the feet of Akalah.

The Throne was of gold and the back shaped like two huge, partially folded wings that met high above her head, so that seated or standing, these golden wings seemed part of the Goddess.

Her entrance and exits were dramatic and were a credit to the stage-craft of the Priests. A puff of perfumed smoke and there stood the Goddess before the golden throne, at the end of the ceremony, another puff of perfumed smoke and Akalah vanished.

But never before had Tim-Ur been so close to her nor seen how really lovely she was.

Akalah now stood before the Throne while behind and above her glowed the

golden wings. She was clad in a loose fitting robe of emerald green, gathered at the waist with a belt of golden squares, the long end of which belt hung nearly to the floor, where her golden sandals showed beneath the hem of her gown. Her form a goddess might truly envy, and her face was such that one bowed in speechless adoration before its transcending beauty. Her skin was like delicately tinted ivory, with the faintest of blushes on her cheeks, her lips were full and red, her eyes a gray-green, as when the morning light strikes the sea, and her bronze hair that gleamed with golden highlights, bound about the brow with a chaplet of emeralds, fell in curling cascades over her shoulders.

And as she stood there she leaned on a great two-handed sword of bronze so long that it reached nearly to her shoulders.

Tim-Ur, the new priest, was being led before her, for his official welcome to the service of the Temple; loud swelled the chanting of the other priests, louder roared the responses of the people, and Tim-Ur was kneeling before the Goddess; the music rose to a soul-stirring crescendo and then he stole a glance upwards. . . . Gray-green eyes, solemn, beautiful beneath their long lashes, gazed down at him, and then between those two beings there leapt a glance, so strange, so intense, a recognition of kindred souls . . . love at first sight, if you will. . . . but an understanding of spirits that needed no words to confirm it, the realization of which shook Tim-Ur to the very fibres of his being with its utter hopelessness, for the Goddess was a vestal and could not be given in marriage.

Tim-Ur's love affair seemed indeed hopeless, but he kept his secret well and by his seeming piety and willingness to serve before the Altar, he gained the confidence and esteem of the older

priests. And when night after night he kept long vigils before the Altar of Poseidon, the others no longer paid him any attention, save to be grateful that they could always rely on him to keep burning the Sacred Fires while they slept.

Tim-Ur, however, knew his strategem would work, because in due time the High Priest mentioned his seeming piety to Akalah and so it came about that, in the silent watches of the night, the Goddess stole into the Temple and met for the first time on equal footing the man she had come to love.

From then on their romance, hopeless though it might be, grew apace. And from Akalah, Tim-Ur learned much of the inner workings of the priesthood. The High Priest, growing old and craving companionship in his declining years, treated Akalah as though she was his own daughter, and to her confided many of the mysteries of the Temple. She was told the secret of the Scimitar of the Sun, the method whose perpetual motion was known only to the priests. She was taught also the formula for making the flexible glass, on whose transparent rolls the priests etched their learning with acid, forming an unbreakable, permanent record that would defy countless centuries.

And last but not least, the High Priest confided in her the formula for making Kallite.

This formula had to do with the breaking up of the atom and thereby releasing untold amounts of its latent energy. Long ago the scientifically-minded Priests had discovered this, and though it was a carefully guarded secret in the hands of their faction known as the White Magicians, they had for years used it to do most of the hard, laborious work of the land.

The use of Kallite had freed the common man from much of the drudgery

of ordinary toil and gave him more leisure with which to enjoy life.

But the priests jealously guarded both the formula and the supply of Kallite on hand, for while if properly controlled it was a powerful force for the good of humanity, in inexperienced hands its destructive force was appalling.

Marvelous were the uses of Kallite. It dug their mines, it was the motive power of the ships both of the sea and those that flew through the air to Atlantis' far-flung colonies. It cut the stupendous blocks of marble for temple and palace, and transported them from the distant quarries, and did a myriad other labors also.

And yet the men of Atlantis were not satisfied. To the ears of Tim-Ur came rumors of dissatisfaction among a radical element known as the Black Magicians, to distinguish them from the white-garbed Priesthood. But the politics of the country did not concern the lovers, who were forming their own little plot to escape from the Temple.

Akalah had a servant, a deaf mute, named Ord, a skillful worker of metals, and Ord had taken the great Sword of the Goddess and detaching the hilt had hollowed it out and threaded it so that it could be easily removed. Into this receptacle (the bronze hilt of the Sword) Akalah had placed a specially prepared roll of the flexible glass on which she had carefully copied the formula of the same flexible glass; the secret of perpetual motion as used in the Scimitar of the Sun; and most important, the formula for making Kallite on a large scale, besides other scientific data she thought might be of value to them.

"If, Beloved," Akalah said, "you could seize one of the air-flyers; just before dawn when the City sleeps, we could slip away without rousing the Temple Guards. We could fly with a sufficient supply of Kallite to carry us beyond the

farthest colony to the west to new lands beyond the reach of the White Magicians. There, with the scientific knowledge I have secreted in the hilt of my Sword, we could reign as God and Goddess of some strange tribe and bring them material blessings that would seem almost divine to them."

Thus the lovers dreamed and planned, until finally a day was set when Tim-Ur arranged to have a flyer outside the Temple Gate. All night he would tend the Sacred Fire and just before the Priests entered the Temple for the Service to the Rising Sun, in the darkness before the dawn, Akalah would meet him and together they would fly westward to new lands and a new life together.

At last the night of their departure arrived. Nervously Tim-Ur spent the long hours of waiting, in feeding the Sacred Fire and alternately kneeling before the Statue of Poseidon, begging the God's forgiveness for his Sin of Sacrilege, restlessly pacing back and forth before the Altar.

Came at last the hour of darkness that proceeds the dawn, the Sacred Fire cast gigantic, flickering shadows of Poseidon and his prancing horses against the wall of the Temple. The Scimitar of the Sun swung back and forth with maddening regularity, and Tim-Ur waited in vain for the coming of the Goddess.

What had gone wrong? Was their plot to escape discovered? Slowly, as on lagging feet, the minutes slipped by; already through the gate of the Temple, the sky beyond the palaces on the Eastern hills was becoming gray; and in a few moments the Temple Guard would begin to mount the walls, their brazen trumpets would welcome the rising sun, the stolen flyer would be found and the lovers' chance to escape would be lost.

Then suddenly outside came the sound of hurrying feet, and Tim-Ur saw not only the Temple Guard rushing to the walls, but with them the entire order of Priesthood, with golden armor over their white robes and high pointed helmets with burnished wings of the Fire-Worshippers upon their metal curls. Vaguely he sensed that some dire disaster threatened the Temple, what it was, he knew not.

Then from the interior of the Temple came Akalah, running swiftly, the great Sword in her arms. "Oh, Beloved," she cried, "all night I have been at a council of the Guardians of the Temple, and have just this moment been free to come to you. A terrible disaster threatens. The Black Magicians have stolen the Temple's entire supply of Kallite! Do you realize what that means? A minute bit of that force, even if properly controlled is terribly destructive, but, oh Tim-Ur! the Black Magicians know not how to control it and in that box of Kallite they have stolen, is potential destruction enough to wipe out all Atlantis!"

Even as she spoke and the horror of the situation, with its disruption of their well-laid plans, broke upon the bewildered mind of Tim-Ur, he saw through the bronze gates of the Temple a long line of black-clad figures coming slowly, cautiously down the broad avenue.

"The Black Magicians," cried Akalah. Nearer, nearer they came and as the sun rose over the hills, it glinted dully on their black armor and close fitting black helmets with their black, horse-hair plumes.

One, evidently a leader, strode in advance, in his hands he carried a small black box about a foot square.

"Look," cried Akalah, "the box of Kallite! Oh, the fool, the fool! He does not know how to control that terrible

force and once released it will destroy not this temple alone but all Atlantis!"

Tim-Ur heard the High Priest call out from the Temple Wall begging the Black Magician not to release the terrible force, but even as he pleaded, the leader of the opposing forces, with a sinister smile, pointed the box at the bronze gates and pressed a lever.

The Temple walls cracked from side to side, Akalah and Tim-Ur were swept swiftly into one last embrace by the staggering floor. Through the rent in the Temple walls. Tim-Ur saw palace after palace crumble to dust amid mighty roars, as if tortured nature cried aloud in agony. From the sides of the hills burst an ominous red glow and then, as earthquake upon earthquake rocked the land, fiery streams of lava flowed from the shattered hills. The floor of the Temple was rent asunder at their very feet; down fell the Sword of Akalah to the sandy floor below, and as Akalah, the Goddess, cried, "Farewell, Beloved!" the ground reeled beneath their feet and great walls of water overwhelmed the Temple as it sank beneath the Sea.

* * *

For some moments Bill Carstairs sat stunned by the catastrophe. Then, to his clearing brain, came the realization that this brief glimpse into the life of Tim-Ur, a noble of Atlantis, was only at best a vision of the past, and that the destruction of Atlantis was something far away and remote. Yet with the memory of the Goddess Akalah, of her who had been held so recently in his arms, it seemed impossible she was but a figment of his imagination.

It had all been so real to him and now as he thought of it, wasn't it Plato, who lived long before Christ, who heard the legend of Atlantis from an Egyptian Priest? Atlantis had sunk beneath the

sea thousands upon thousands of years ago . . . and Bill Carstairs suddenly realized how far away Akalah, his beloved, was, and his soul bowed down in agony at the thought of eternal separation.

Then his tear-dimmed eyes lifted to the glass case and there was the Sword of Akalah! And in its hollow hilt was the roll of flexible glass with all the scientific data . . . Akalah's gift to modern humanity, to free it from drug-ery and crushing labor.

For a moment Carstairs doubted his ability to read the Atlantean writing and then his eyes strayed to the hilt and the strange, faintly discernible characters formed the words "THE SWORD OF AKALAH" and Bill Carstairs knew that he could read the writing on the glass scroll!

Without weighing the consequences he stood up and, in his eager desire to see the contents of the hollow sword hilt, struck the glass a shattering blow and attempted to lift out the sword. But Bill, strong as he was, now met an almost insurmountable obstacle; he had failed to take into consideration the huge block of sandstone in which the sword was partially embedded. Its weight made it almost impossible to lift and as the attendants aroused by the breaking glass rushed into the room, Bill found it impossible to make a quick get-away with the precious sword.

So they overpowered him and Bill was put in the county jail, to await trial for attempted theft of a sword from the museum.

It came out in the papers and I at once visited him to learn if I could, what had possessed him to attempt to steal a sword, and from him I heard the startling story of Tim-Ur, the Priest.

I offered what help I could to Bill and several of us pooled our resources and

got him a good lawyer, but Bill spoiled his own case. He asked the Judge on the day of the trial if he might not attempt to open the hilt of the sword, that he knew it was hollow and contained valuable scientific information.

The Sword was there as "exhibit A" and as the Judge was feeling particularly good that day, he permitted Bill to try to open the hilt. But alas, the heat of the lava that had poured over the sword as it lay in the sand had expanded the threads or the long action of salt water had corroded them; whatever the reason, Bill could not budge the hilt, struggle as he might.

A faint ripple of laughter ran round the court, the bailiff rapped for order. Then Bill, his face red with exertion and embarrassment asked the Judge to allow him to use a blow-torch to open the hilt. Immediately a violent protest against the destruction of this priceless museum piece was raised by the opposing attorney and the Judge, whose patience was beginning to wear thin, asked Bill, sarcastically just what kind of scientific data he expected to find in a sword hilt that was estimated to be thousands of years old.

"Your Honor," said Bill, "There's lots of important things in there about perpetual motion, the breaking up of the atom, how to make flexible glass. . . ." But poor Bill got no further. I think it was the reference to perpetual motion that finally convinced the Judge that Bill was insane, for he then and there committed him to an asylum.

Now that Bill was in trouble, several of his wealthy friends tried to use their influence in his behalf but to no avail. So they saw to it that, instead of being committed to a public insane asylum, he was allowed to be sent to Dr. Von Arnstein's Sanitarium for the mentally deficient.

For some time after Bill was placed

there I went to see him regularly, but he grew morose and sullen and did not seem to care whether he had visitors or not, so with the passing years my visits became less frequent and finally stopped altogether.

And then after all these years came Bill's letter that both startled and frightened me. It was a rambling letter of many pages, almost incoherent at times, but always showing how the iron had bitten into Bill's soul. In part he said: "Knowing what blessings to humanity the secrets of the Sword hilt contained, I was moved by altruistic motives to try to free the race from the drudgery of labor and the horrors of war, with no thought of ultimate gain to myself; although any one of its secrets would have brought me untold wealth; I sought only to do good to my fellow men. But they would not let me open the hilt. Blind Fools! They were afraid of destroying a museum piece, when the salvation of the workers of the world lay hidden in the hilt! And then they adjudged me mad and put me away where I could do no harm; I, who only wished to do good.

"Well, perhaps I have grown a little mad with the passing of the years and the association of other madmen, but if I have, I have also acquired a madman's craftiness.

"In the long, weary years, I have spent here, I have recalled vaguely how to make a crude form of Kallite. I have asked them to let me try some chemical experiments. And to humor me they have given me some harmless starch and sugar to play with. Harmless! Out of these two ingredients I can make enough Kallite to blast my way out of this mad prison . . . And then, John, once free, I'll get the Sword of Akalah this time and once I open the hilt and learn how to make Kallite on a large scale, in three months I can produce

enough to destroy the world! Oh don't laugh, I saw once what a small bit of this diabolical force did to the huge island of Atlantis . . . The World didn't want the blessings Akalah sent to it, then let it take its destruction from my hands.

"Good-bye, John, by the time you receive this I will be free . . . FREE! And the world will have just three months to live . . . !"

So ended the letter of Bill Carstairs. In the morning paper that arrived before the letter, appeared two very important items, one read:

"MYSTERIOUS EXPLOSION AT DR. VON ARNSTEIN'S SANITARIUM

Last night the whole north wing of Dr. Von Arnstein's Sanitarium was blown out by a terrific explosion and eleven inmates are either dead or missing. The police are baffled as to the cause of the disaster, as no known explosives

could have caused such violent destruction. Government officials are also investigating."

The second article read:

MUSEUM ROBBED

Last night the museum was broken into and robbed of a sword found in the Atlantic Ocean. The robber or robbers passed up countless articles of priceless value to take this ancient weapon. A strange coincidence is that William Carstairs, who was committed to Dr. Von Arnstein's Sanitarium thirteen years ago for attempting to steal this same sword, is among those missing after the mysterious explosion at the sanitarium last night."

So Bill has the Sword of Akalah and its secrets at last. . . .

AND THE WORLD HAS JUST THREE MONTHS!

THE END



In the Realm of Books

By C. A. BRANDT

THE GOLD CHASE. By Robert W. Chambers, published by D. Appleton Century Co. 250 pages. \$2.00.

Mr. Chambers must have enjoyed the writing of this book, which makes pleasant reading for all boys whether still small or grown up. It deals with a treasure buried in the Florida Everglades by one of De Soto's adventurers. The story proper starts in Monte Carlo, where Aulone, slightly tipsy, brags about a map which he found hidden in a hollow golden ball, wrapped up in a chain-mail glove, which in turn was hidden in a small golden skull. Aulone's bragging set in motion a gang of international crooks, who after Aulone's death pursue his niece and almost beat her to the ultimate possession of the buried treasure. An enjoyable book.

More Adventure

SAM CAMPBELL, GENTLEMAN. By Edison Marshall, published by H. C. Kinsey & Co., Inc. 273 pages. \$2.00.

This is one of the best books yet turned out by Mr. Campbell, and it is one of the finest adventure stories I ever had the pleasure of reading.

Sam Campbell, a Hongkong Radio distributor, is heartbroken because his faithless and worthless fiancée has given him the gate, as we say it so prettily. Instead of rejoicing he is utterly dejected, but a lovely stranger, Elizabeth, raises him from despair. Elizabeth is in the East to effect the rescue of her girlhood sweetheart, who has been held captive in Yunnan, by one Chow Chan a former Boxer War Lord. They become man and wife, in name only, in order to facilitate their traveling together, and to gain access to the district where Chow Chan is planning to establish an empire of his own. Yunnan adjoins Cambodia (French Indo-China), and the French, believing Chow Chan to be their friend and to be totally harmless, refuse their help. So Sam and Elizabeth set out alone and finally after many adventures reach the Tiger Mountains where Chow Chan's secret stronghold and munition plants are located. Entering is easy, but—how they escape is another story, which you must read for yourself. The book is loaded with suspense, action, mysterious happenings, etc., etc. You surely will enjoy it.

IN THE SHADOW OF THE CHEKA. By John de N. Kennedy, published by The Macaulay Co., 381 4th Ave., New York. 320 pages. \$2.00.

Kovylin, still a Czarist at heart, is employed in the offices of secret police in Moscow. As an expert on precious stones, he, though not entirely trusted, is sent to Amsterdam accompanied by two Cheka commissars, to sell the Romanoff collection of rubies. Kovylin manages to escape to America with the rubies of course, but how he got through the customs with them is "deleted." The very angry Cheka catches up with him in Chicago, but his shrewdness enables him to make a successful deal with the Chicago Chekistas, receive a full pardon from Moscow and is even allowed to retain some of the less valuable rubies.

The book is crammed with excitement—pursuits—narrow escapes—tortures and everything that makes such a book readable.

Anent Science Fiction

Fiction today—Fact tomorrow.

Not very long ago I saw the film *Becky Sharp* in natural colors and the color effects truly were a magnificent achievement. Do you know that moving pictures in natural colors were predicted as early as 1872. I found this in a volume of short stories written by Kurt Lasswitz, a German Astronomer and Scientist.

WORLDS WITHOUT END. By H. Spencer Jones, M.A., Sc.D., F.R.S. Astronomer Royal. Hon. Fellow, Jesus College, Cambridge. New York, The Macmillan Company. Pages XV, 329 contents, List of Illustrations and Index. \$3.00.

Starting with the earth as a topic appertaining to the astronomer, the first chapter of *Worlds Without End* tells the reader of things earthly, of which comparatively few of us know. We read of the length of the year and are told that it varies; it has been concluded from early astronomical records that the day has been increasing in duration at the rate of about one thousandth of a second in a century. The rate of rotation of our earth has its other changes of an irregular nature, at least we are told of no 'method in their madness'. A century

and a half ago its rotation slowed down only to accelerate in 1899. The change amounted to nearly a minute. Then, the specific gravity of the earth being known, it is found to be almost as heavy per unit as iron. We know that there is internal heat, from volcanoes for instance. We know that many meteorites are composed of nickeliferous iron. So it is believed that the earth has a core of a nickel-iron alloy, in the liquid state and about 4,000 miles in diameter. The moon is the subject of the second chapter, and the reader is told much that is far from familiar to most of us. The appearance of the new moon with the old moon in its arms, as chronicled in the "grand old ballad of Sir Patrick Spens" is shown to be due to sunlight reflected from the surface of the earth to feebly light the area of the moon outside of the narrow crescent.

The sun's family of planets fills one chapter. We are told of the high reflecting power of Venus, which may be taken as accounting for its brilliance in the early morning, when it is the morning star. The possibility of life on other planets is discussed and comets and shooting stars are given a chapter. How many of us know that Halley's comet is represented on the Bayeux tapestry, with a group of people pointing it out to each other? This was in the year 1066, the year of the battle of Hastings. An interesting thing noted in the book is that the weight of a comet is insignificant in the cosmic sense, probably less than one millionth of the weight of the earth. Yet they may be many times larger than the sun. Ten thousand cubic miles of tail will not contain more matter than one cubic inch of air.

About half the book is required to bring the reader to the stellar universe. Yet how many people realize that the sun is a star? How many, who have the energy to be present at the rising of the planet Venus, know that the blazing object is as dull as the

earth, and has no light of its own? It has higher reflecting power than that of the earth. And the sun introduces the reader to the stellar world. The most advanced description of the results of astronomical investigation are given, so that one hardly realizes that it is a popular book, designed for those who may be termed the laity. The word astronomy means etymologically the law of the stars, yet here we have a treatise on that subject which does not get to the stars until half the pages are expended in the most interesting and quite fascinating account of the solar system, which can only boast one star, the sun. Its nearest star neighbor is approximately six million million miles away. To quote from the book we see this star where it was about four years previously. It is so far off that it takes the light from it that length of time to reach the earth.

The illustrations, some plates and others in the text, are very interesting. Especially the plate facing page 198 showing (letter c) the spectrum of the sun and of Alpha Centauri, described on pages 211-212 demonstrating the motion of the star in the line of sight is to be particularly commended. It sometimes seems that astronomers do so many miracles, that this application of the Doppler principle carried out by spectroscopy is taken by them as a matter of course. It is one of the greatest achievements of stellar science. The last chapter of the book is entitled "What was and what is to be" and is a complete essay in itself. Naturally it brings in Eddington and Jeans, two men who have made abstract science as good, or rather far better reading than most works of the highest grade of literature. In this book Professor Jones is doing the same thing. The two writers named above have occupied a position, almost of their own. Professor H. Spencer Jones makes a third member of the group. We can pay him no higher compliment. T.O'C.S.



DISCUSSIONS

In this department we shall discuss every month topics of interest to readers. The editors invite correspondents on all subjects directly or indirectly related to the stories appearing in this magazine.

Suggestions, Criticisms and Appreciations from a Friendly Reader

Editor, AMAZING STORIES:

Although I have read *AMAZING STORIES* for over two years, this is my first letter to you. And after that period of time it is small wonder that I have a lot to say! So without any further ado I'll get going.

1. I believe you publish a better grade of stories than your competitors do. Your interplanetary tales are much more sensible, and you print a great many stories dealing with archaeology. Keep it up.

2. Your Editorials are swell. They certainly raise the standard of "our" magazine.

3. You have a grand assortment of authors writing for you. My favorites are Dr. Keller, Jones, Campbell, Dr. Smith, Verrill, Scheer, Burt, Nathanson, Skidmore, Stone and Eshbach. However can't you get Hamilton, Williamson and Weinbaum to write for you? They do some good work for others.

4. I like Morey's covers. The colors he uses are very fine, making the scenes look quite natural. His inside illustrations though could be better. Sometimes he puts out good ones, but often they appear too hurried and sketchy. His illustrations for "Rehabilitators Consolidated," "Liners of Time," "The Martian Mail," "Relativity to the Rescue," and "Parasite" were excellent. You can see by these illustrations that he can be good, if he wants to. By the way can't you have a few more illustrations for the feature story, instead of just one? Also for each part of a serial? They do not have to be full page illustrations, such as you had for the story "Space War." It would improve the magazine greatly.

5. The comet tail title is sure an improvement over the old title. It makes Morey's covers look much better.

6. Have two serials running all the time. I like long stories.

7. Let us have more interplanetary stories, especially those by Campbell and Jones.

8. How about another Quarterly—a reprint quarterly? It is long since we had one.

9. If possible increase its size.

10. The last few issues have been bi-monthly, and in the February issue you said it will go bi-monthly for the present. I hope this will not be for long.

11. *AMAZING STORIES* is the best magazine of science-fiction, bar none.

FRANK BOLLMEYER,
2155 Gleason Avenue,
New York.

(A magazine has to be conducted on a definite method. Many different people are to be pleased and there are very definite limitations to what we can do. Your appreciation of our efforts is most acceptable; we feel that our Readers are our friends, and there are very few letters of unfavorable criticism received by us, and we are always ready to print them.—EDITOR.)

A Letter to One of Our Authors, Which Letter We Have Captured for Ourselves.

Editor, AMAZING STORIES:

Mr. Skidmore will certainly allow the publication of an intimate but short note in appreciation of his "Posi and Nega" series. Addressed to him it runs as follows.

From my standpoint as a worker in mental disorders, I appreciate more than the general, the constructive mental attitude engendered by your type of stories. There can be no more effective literature than this to exercise the faculty of distinguishing reality from fancy and be assured that faculty is the "sine qua non" of mental health. You acquaint your readers with the present state of knowledge in molecular physics—your fancies, though charming, do not intrude into the realm of residual impression. Accept my congratulations upon your fine work in one of the most fruitful fields of our times.

R. W. HALL,
Rockland State Hospital,
Orangeburg, N. Y.

(In taking the liberty of publishing this letter of such high appreciation we feel that we are putting into carefully expressed ideas the impression the "Posi and Nega" stories have made upon a specially informed reader. The two people have had a long life in the pages of *AMAZING STORIES*. EDITOR.)

Australia again is heard from; it is the wife of the reader that writes, while her husband reads (?)

Editor, AMAZING STORIES:

I might as well be candid and say straight away that I do not read the Magazine, but my husband is keenly interested in it, and I have to see that it is delivered to him each month. Occasionally, when I have looked at the Magazine, I notice the number of letters from Australians who seem to be continually grumbling about not being able to get the issues up to date.

Today your October issue has just been received, and as you will see by the above date, the 3rd of October, I think it must have come by that speed rocket (or whatever it is), depicted on the cover, from America.

So when any of your Australian readers complain again, just tell them to do like me—give a definite order to a reputable book-seller for *AMAZING STORIES* (it costs 1/9d by the way) and they will get it within a fortnight of each month. My husband has been getting the magazine regularly for nearly 4 years now.

MURIEL DUNCAN,
220 Albert Street, Brisbane,
Queensland, Australia.

(Our thanks go to Mistress Muriel for the good advice she gives other residents in the land they affectionately call "Aussie." We have learned that from some of our readers in the antipodes. There have been very impressive complaints about the trouble in getting the magazine from Australian readers, but you seem to have solved the problem. *EDITOR.*)

A Collector of Science Fiction writes us
Editor, AMAZING STORIES:

I have been an interested reader of your magazine since its inception, and have not missed any of the issues since then. I am also one of those "nuts" that make a collection of Science Fiction so I suppose I'll be one of your customers to the end.

I am really sorry that you find it necessary to curtail publication to bi-monthly but I sincerely hope that the new year will mend that trouble and that we will soon see the *AMAZING* on the news stands every month as before.

With very best wishes and true appreciation of the many interesting and unusual stories of the past.

HILTON R. BOWMAN,
21 Akers Street,
Johnstown, Penna.

(Your kind expressions are greatly appreciated by our staff. A few words like

these are a direct help to us in our work even if we are ready to publish scolding letters also.—*EDITOR.*)

A Reader of Science Fiction wishes to
Dispose of his Collection

Editor, AMAZING STORIES:

I have been a reader of your magazine, *AMAZING STORIES*, from the beginning of its publication, getting my copies of the same through one of our local news stores in this city.

I have noted in your Discussion Columns that you have frequent requests from your readers for either complete sets or single numbers and you have directed your correspondents to apply to your Circulation Department for a possible source of supply. I am writing you, therefore, to inform you that I have a complete set of *AMAZING STORIES* up to date, which I would like to dispose of *as a whole* and I trust you may help me in the matter. I am getting old, and want to see the set fall into good hands before I go, as I have seen valuable books in my time disposed of by executors almost as if they were mere waste paper. I do not know what value my set has in the book-market at present, but as I am not anxious to make any profit, I should think that ten cents per copy would not be an unreasonable price, *provided the whole set is taken*, the express charges to be paid by the purchaser. I have also a number of Quarterly copies, all that were published, I believe, which I would price at 15 cents each. I have only one Annual at the same rate. All in very good condition.

ROBERT H. COREY,
3302 Daytona Avenue,
Cincinnati, Ohio.

We Certainly Have Friends in England,
Amazing Stories is liked there.

Editor, AMAZING STORIES:

One day, nearly four years ago, I happened to glance through a magazine, merely looking at the pictures. I became interested and started to read it, and didn't put it down until I had finished reading the last page. I looked at the name, it was called *AMAZING STORIES*, and thus was created one more reader who is really thankful for such a mag.

I have just finished reading A. Hyatt Verrill's "Through the Andes," and was it good? Yes sir, it was great.

Neil R. Jones, Dr. E. E. Smith and Dr. D. H. Keller are my favorites, let's have more of them please. I would also like to see more stories like "Spacehounds of I.P.C." and "Skylark Three"—They were truly amazing stories.

I like the idea suggested by Harold C. Clint (June issue 1935) in his eighth point, it is a real good theme.

Sometimes I think it is heroic on your part to take all the brickbats that come at you, and then tell us you like them. I have no complaints to make regarding Morey—he is O.K. I think you are all doing your best, so why grumble about it?

You can rest assured that you have a small band of staunch supporters here in England who wish nothing but "Life Everlasting" to "OUR MAG."

I have quite a collection of back numbers to spare and anybody here in England can have them for the price of postage.

P. T. FITZGERALD,
12 Queensland Road,
Holloway, London 7, England.

(We sincerely thank you for your kind words. An editor should do his best to please; we venture to hope that we do something of an approach to that degree of excellence. One thing is certain **AMAZING STORIES** pleases most of our English readers, even if we do sometimes get a scolding from one of them. **EDITOR.**)

A Delightful Letter of Delightful Criticism. We Wish We Received More as Good as This.

Editor, AMAZING STORIES:

It is with a great deal of pleasure that I find a noticeable decrease in the use of the coined contraction "mag"; this uncouth, vulgar expression was used but twice or thrice in all of the eighteen letters printed in the Discussions Column of February. Contrast the above with the constant use of said expression in so-called science-fiction magazines of three or four months ago. By the way it is found the least number of times in **AMAZING STORIES**, which goes to show that the readers who rate this magazine in a higher estimation than the others are slightly more cultured than the readers who praise the others. (Can you untangle the above sentence?) Too many readers complain that certain stories are not science-fiction. If the title of the magazine was Science-Fiction Stories they would be justified in complaining; however the case is not thus. The name of the magazine is **AMAZING STORIES**. On consulting the dictionary we find that the verb "Amaze" is defined as follows: to confound or stun with fear, surprise or wonder; to astonish. Can any reader find a story in this magazine which does not fulfill that definition?

Take "Hoffman's Widow" by Floyd Oles for instance. Doubtless there are many letters in this department which ask you why you printed such a story, stating that that story had not a bit of science to it. Granted; the aforementioned story was not science-

fiction, but who said it was? Did it not make you think, wonder? Personally I found it a very interesting tale, beautifully written, although Mr. Oles has not yet learned the correct use of the semicolon. I hope you do not mind my saving this, Mr. Oles; if you find mistakes in my grammar I will be more than happy to be informed of them.

Mr. Editor, or whoever compiles the Questionnaire, may I point out a very slight grammatical error in the February issue? On page sixty-seven, question eighteen asks, "What group does the octopus belong to?" Would it not be better to ask "To what group does the octopus belong?" A sentence should never end with a preposition, or so I learned in English. I realize that the matter is very trivial, but—oh, let's drop the subject!

One of my main faults is that as soon as I have read but one or two stories I start my letter to "Amazing." It would be more tactful, I believe, to wait until I have read every story in the issue.

My mistake; I just looked at the Title Page and, found in bold type, Science Fiction, just below the name of the magazine. This contradicts two of my former paragraphs.

Our British friend, Geoffrey Welks, was quite justified in his criticism of the misuse of the English language by Americans. While slang increases the versatility and vocabulary of any language, Mr. Hoskin's expression, "Aw! Why don't youse guys quit bellyaching?" is not permitted where cultured English is used extensively. (This letter seems to be devoted entirely to grammar.)

At the time of writing I have not received any correspondence through my request; however I believe that by the time this epistle is printed (or am I taking too much for granted?) I shall have received enough to satisfy my yearning.

WILLIS CONOVER, JR.,
280 Shepard Avenue,
Kenmore, New York.

(This letter, which we now feel like complimenting for the second time—we have complimented it once in the heading—tells its own story, even if the writer is inclined towards the end to take back some things he said. The subsidiary title does not assert that we absolutely confine the text to science fiction. This type of story is the characteristic feature of the magazine, but how about amazing stories with little or even no science in them? Etymologically a preposition should precede its noun, but do you never say "What are you looking at?" We shall hope for more letters as good as this one from you.—**EDITOR.**)

A Review of Some Phases of Science Fiction Editor, AMAZING STORIES:

As a student of science and reader of science fiction, I should like to have this letter published in the "Discussions department" of *AMAZING STORIES*. For the past five or six years I have been a serious-minded reader of this kind of literature and an ardent admirer of the very great progress which is being made in the many different phases of science and scientific experimentation. I am penning this letter primarily for the purpose of presenting to the readers of this publication, if you will enable me to do so, by publishing it, my personal concept as a reader of science-fiction, of the valuation of science-fiction to the advancement and progress of science in general. I think it will be of general interest to the readers, and am hoping that it will stimulate a desire on their part to criticize and advance criticisms of their own in regard to the subject I am about to discuss. I consider the Discussions Department of *AMAZING STORIES* magazine a splendid medium through which the individual reader is afforded an opportunity to express his personal opinion and viewpoints on all matters appertaining directly or indirectly to science and science-fiction. Any person who has a knowledge of the basic principles and cardinal fundamentals of all the more important divisions of scientific endeavour, is, I believe, eligible to formulate a logical viewpoint of his own, concerning the relation of science-fiction literature to pure scientific research in the world of to-day, and in the world of the distant future. It is only logical to presume that many of the now fictitious science narratives, which appear upon the pages of this and similar publications will some day attain full and absolute realization. When we take into consideration the fact that science has already performed marvels in chemistry, medicine, physics and specialized astronomical research work, we must admit that what is extravagant fiction to-day may be pure reality to-morrow. In full view of the fact that science is almost annually discovering new truths and making startling revelations in various of its diversified phases, it would seem that the word "impossible," as applied to scientific achievements can no longer be found in the dictionary. If I were to write an editorial relating to the merits of this type of educational literature, I would do my level best to convince skeptical persons of the major importance of science-fiction narrations and articles. I would then endeavor to instill into the minds of these disbelieving persons a desire to form an association with such literature. It should not be difficult for any

scientifically minded person to realize the true valuation of such literature to the development and furtherance of knowledge. We have only to cite a few examples of the past to bear out the truth of the statements which my letter contains. In order to exemplify these statements permit me to give you three concrete examples.

1. Jules Verne, celebrated creator of science-fiction, wrote a number of fascinating novels pertaining to futuristic scientific achievements and foretold some of the most astonishing achievements in the world of pure science. His book, entitled "Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea," heralded the coming of the submarine and deep-sea exploration. Do not forget the fact that when the book was written, the submarine was nothing more than a dream. This dream however materialized with the invention of the first under-water craft.

2. His book entitled "AROUND THE WORLD IN EIGHTY DAYS" heralded the record breaking flight of the late and courageous Wiley Post, who in a monoplane spanned the globe in seven days. Here again we find science-fiction converted into pure reality. And although Wiley Post's flight around the globe was somewhat different from the voyage of the character in Verne's book, it bears out essentially the same principles—an increase in speed to demonstrate the progress in speed which has been made, and which, for that matter, is still being made by the hand of man.

3. Verne's novel, entitled "FIVE WEEKS IN A BALLOON," announced the coming of extensive travelling in balloons and ascensions into the stratosphere, to make observations miles above the surface of the earth. Here we have even a greater conversion of fiction into cold reality, for we are now moving very gradually but surely in the direction of futuristic interplanetary travel, and the establishment of communication between this earth and other planets of our immediate Solar System.

And here is another point which might be considered in this discussion of the relation of science fiction to the progress of pure science in various of its phases and ramifications. Before the invention of the microscope, who would have dreamed that a single drop of water could contain thousands of individual microscopic organisms, moving rapidly from place to place, performing specialized functions of their own, and as fully ignorant of our existence as we are of theirs. If writers of science-fiction had lived in those days, long before the advent of the first microscope, many very interesting facts might have been conceived of in connection with the unseen world living in a single drop of water. If writers of

science fiction had lived in those days, and if those same writers had written on the subject, how soon their so-called fantastic stories would have materialized in the light of later day knowledge obtained through investigations into the unknown conducted with the microscope.

A magazine like *AMAZING STORIES* is really the forerunner of all future development, achievement and experimentation in the world of scientific endeavour. And this type of literature, such as presented in the pages of such a publication tends not only to broaden the mind of the individual reader but also to improve upon his education and to widen and extend the scope of an outlook, which would otherwise remain narrow and warped.

And to what do I attribute the increasing popularity of science-fiction narratives and articles? The answer is a very simple one. I attribute this popularity to the fact that magazines and periodicals like *AMAZING STORIES* have a strong magnetic personality, which reigns supreme and exalted above all other forms of literature. In the Discussions section of *AMAZING STORIES*, I have many times seen letters from England, Australia and other parts of the world, proving that the number of persons who find this a desirable educative and entertaining form of literature are slowly but steadily increasing, proving further that there are many heretofore uninterested persons who are now developing a strong interest in it, and who are becoming conscious of the fact that science-fiction narrations are playing an important rôle in the great drama of the progress of science. As an educational organ science-fiction is rendering a splendid service in the presentation of literature, which is devoid of technical, scientific phrases, which might confuse the reader and cause him to lose interest in the matter under discussion. Personally the information which I have derived from the reading of this and similar publications has furnished me with valuable material on science in general, and has enabled me to prepare a few minor science discourses, which I shall soon have the good fortune to deliver to a small but appreciative group of serious-minded students, who are now engaged in the study of General Science at Columbia University.

I have given my reasons for believing that this type of literature should be read by all intelligent-thinking, scientifically-minded persons, who are desirous of obtaining knowledge of value and an insight into the mechanism of the world of science.

1. It has the unexcelled quality of being both interesting and educational.

2. It is really the forerunner of all future scientific development and revelation.

3. I consider science-fiction to be a very desirable form of literature, because it is clean.

FRANK C. DANNBACHER,
253 Senator Street,
Brooklyn, N. Y.

(This letter is so adequate in its presentation of its topics that comment is not necessary. But it does comfort an editor who is doing what he can to please a number of readers with widely varying ideas, to receive some measure of appreciation for his humble efforts. This letter is an illustration of this point. EDITOR.)

A Tribute to an Old Time Favorite of Our Readers

Editor, *AMAZING STORIES*:

Just read "The Fall of Mercury" by Leslie F. Stone. I don't remember ever enjoying a science fiction story more. It was interesting from the first word. Why don't you publish more of this writer's stories? It has been a long time since she has had a story in your magazine. I've read some very good stories by her in other magazines. Why don't you publish more of hers? I am an old *AMAZING* fan and swear by your magazine. Let's have more of Leslie F. Stone.

S. MESS,
51 Riverside Drive,
New York City, N. Y.

(We are glad to publish this very just tribute to the distinguished authoress. One of our troubles is that we have not space for all the good work that reaches us. You will we are sure, soon hear from Miss Stone again. EDITOR.)

A Letter from an English Reader

Editor, *AMAZING STORIES*:

I think that *AMAZING STORIES* is the best magazine, bar none. The stories in the August issue I think were O.K. "The Golden Planetoid" excellent. "The Never Dying Light" ditto. The "Kingdom of Thought" good. "Liners of Time" ditto. "The Inner World" not so good. I should be pleased to hear from some reader in the world. Here's good luck to A. S. stories forever.

BERNARD E. TAYLOR,
Sun Haven,
North Dorking,
England.

(There is a letter to console the Editor for some of the scoldings bestowed on him by correspondents, and which are conscientiously published in Discussions. Sometimes we are quite proud of ourselves, when a real scolding letter is printed and we take our scolding patiently. EDITOR.)

Decidedly a Scolding Letter and It Had to Come Some Twelve Thousand Miles

Editor, AMAZING STORIES:

Perhaps I am backward in thinking that the conditions of future times will be much better or worse. That Capitalism will give way to Socialism or Fascism.

The authors of most of your stories don't. They, of course, think everything will advance, except the governing of the people. One of the most important sciences.

As science advances, so does a people advance. The more a people advance, the more complicated the governing of that people becomes.

In the December issue of the A. S., 1934, the same argument was brought up. You slid it off in the discussions pages of a magazine of the future by quoting an old Democratic party. Your answer was about as silly as the quotation "The best governed people are the least governed," and "Let well enough alone."

Why not face facts? Have the complications of governments appear in your pages. Graft, bribery, etc. Have men with iron wills rule the people, have just as strong men opposing them. Let disease and war ride through your pages. Life and death. Then, and then only shall you have the real future.

The serial "Liners of Time" is a good one. Only the author has enough material to write 4 or 5 stories.

Well I suppose "variety is the spice of life."

Time travel! Ridiculous! How can we expect to travel in something we don't understand and never will understand.

The only time such travel will be possible, is when a machine or drug as complicated as our memories, and imaginations is invented.

The "People of the Arrow," I liked it very much (I like some of the stories you see). The author got to the point without a discussion, argument or drug. Why not some more like it?

Do you remember the story "The Metal Doom"? Why not more like it? Please do not introduce it with time travel, space travel. Induce your writers to think of something more original.

JOE BUCHANAN,
Scheyville, via Riverstone,
N. S. W., Australia.

(We find your letter very characteristic. The writer of these lines is so strongly opposed to complication of government, to war and so-called "strong men" being in power, that he can only adhere to his views as ex-

pressed in the quotations you give. Your idea of the future is not very cheerful. We hope it will not be as bad as you picture it. We have a story by the author of "The Metal Doom" on file to appear very soon. Would it not be a bit monotonous if we all thought the same? EDITOR.)

A Letter of Appreciation from Winchester, England.

Editor, AMAZING STORIES:

I have been reading A. S. for some time now, and have at last succeeded in finding a shop that could get it in regularly. You've no idea how hard it was! I see in the December issue that all three science fiction mags can be got in Fleet Street. I heartily agree with the English readers who would like an English Edition.

I see a good deal of argument goes on about the paper edges, and size of the mag. As far as I can see, the contents and not the appearance are the essentials of a good mag.

Though I consider the contents excellent, as a whole, I would like less of the type of "horror" stories that appear from time to time. Such an offender is "Restitution" in this month's issue.

In past numbers, I liked "Liners of Time," "The Inner World," "Earth Rehabilitators Consolidated" best of all.

Though I am laughed at by my school-fellows here at Winchester College for wasting my time on "trash of that sort," I am unperturbed and will still go on, wishing you all the luck you deserve. I too would like to correspond with anyone about anything. I would add that I would like to see also: 1. More than one illustration for long stories. 2. More correct illustrations.

V. R. H. FERGUSON,
69 Kingsgate Street,
Winchester, Hampshire,
England.

(The writer had the great pleasure of visiting Winchester, a number of years ago. The Cathedral is history of the old time architecture of England and of its development from the primitive. Travelers leave the steamers at Southampton and go on to London and never see Winchester, one of the most interesting places in England. AMAZING STORIES gets many letters from England and the Colonies.

Your letter brings very pleasant recollections to the writer. Your suggestions will receive full consideration and we shall hope to follow some of them, for they are much to the point.—EDITOR.)

A Capital Letter from One Who With All Our Faults Seems to Love Us Still

Editor, AMAZING STORIES:

As a faithful follower of **AMAZING STORIES** since its inception I feel impelled to write this letter, and I hope it will be printed in "Discussions." You will soon see that it is not due to any special desire for seeing my name in print. I will begin by what I hope is a careful criticism of the stories. Dr. Rose's "The Lurking Death" is an interestingly written story with a fair development but a moth-eaten plot. I was able to forsee it while reading the story. Try to think up an original plot, Doctor Rose, I'm sure you could do much better. "Stroheim" by James Brookes can be similarly critized. I also believe the characters are too stereotyped and "pat." My congratulations to Kostkos for his "We of the Sun." The basic idea though vaguely indicated in previous works is nevertheless still original and its development, the bringing out of man's emotions and intellectual reactions, is very fine. "When the Top Wobled" by Andersdy is certainly the best story in the issue. (I don't read serials until they are completed.) In short I class it as one of the best short stories I have ever read. The combination of original scientific theories and the behaviour of our planet generally, combined with real thinking on history, current affairs and mankind, produce a story which should serve as an inspiration to other authors. Don't be afraid to include stories taking up modern problems, historical trends, and the so-called weird sciences. Our civilization is tottering because people have not faced economic, political and social issues of the day. "Hoffman's Widow" by Floyd Oles though an interesting story, doesn't belong in "our mag," as it simply isn't science-fiction. You might answer that it is a psychological study, but so is any good novel. Keith's "21931" is vaguely similar in plot not only to Andersdy's work, but more closely resembles certain stories which have appeared among your competitors. However its originality in treatment and the novelty of some of the ideas make it an excellent story. That is all for specific criticism, though it is much too short and inadequate, and now for something more general.

I have heard grievous reports among the "fans" concerning the circulation of **AMAZING STORIES**, which indicate that it is declining. I wish you would specifically answer this. As I have hinted in my criticisms of stories, I think there are some things which readers of science-fiction, at least the more mature, definitely want. Some of these are a realistic treatment of social as well as scientific trends and ideas in the stories, more original plots, more original and sci-

entific ideas, hypotheses, no matter how improbable, as long as the author gives logical and careful explanations, more variety in the formula of the stories printed, e.g. not such a fixed proportion between science and fiction, different varieties of development, as Merrit, Smith, Campbell, Jr., etc.; and finally more real discussions and criticisms of the ideas in the stories similar to 1926-8. Which leads me to remark that perhaps many of the older readers have gone, that "AMAZING" is read mainly by juveniles. This should be a challenge for more writing by the old fans.

Unfortunately or fortunately as the case may be I shall have to close this letter, though I would write much more on science-fiction in general, but I think I'll save that for some other time, and I hope this letter stimulates discussions by the readers.

JACK CYPRIN,
1271 Hoe Avenue,
Bronx, N. Y.

(The writer of the letter printed here, and which we esteem very highly, tells a story, pleasant to us in its indications of loyalty to "your magazine" as we hope you will permit us to call it. We omit a few lines which are a tribute, higher than deserved, to the Editor, but which also give a suggestion which can not be carried out and whose results would be doubtful in any case. Our best and sincerest tribute to what you have written is to say that we shall hope for more letters from you. But a writer who cannot know just how things stand and undertakes to give well meant suggestions, should first of all realize that he is hardly in a position to dictate policy to a magazine as highly appreciated by readers as **AMAZING STORIES**. —EDITOR.)

**Back Numbers of Amazing Stories Wanted.
We Hope the Writer Will Get a Reply.**

Editor, AMAZING STORIES:

Every time I read "Discussions" I see nothing but praise given the stories that appeared in the old issues of **AMAZING STORIES**.

I wish to obtain these back issues to find out if they are as good as the veteran readers claim.

I've read **AMAZING STORIES** for several years and am satisfied with the stories.

Will any reader, desiring to sell his collection, do me a favor and get in touch with me?

ELMER L. PLASCOE,
1228 Halket Ave.,
Braddock, Pa.

A Most Ingenious Presentation of a Paradox in Time Travel

Editor, AMAZING STORIES:

During the past few years, long-suffering science-fiction fans have been presented with many tips of time-travel paradoxes, mostly of the "man-killing-great-grandmother" type. Here is a new paradox which occurred to me recently, and may be of some interest to your readers.

At the beginning of January, 1940, we find our intrepid adventurer—let us call him Edward Stevenson—experimenting in his laboratory, endeavoring to discover the secret of atomic energy. At the end of the first week in January, Stevenson, being a little too impatient for a true scientist, declares this job to be impossible, and turns his attention to time-travel. In this direction he is more successful, and invents a machine which will project him into the future and allow him to stay there about a week.

In the last week of January, therefore, he is successfully projected into the future, namely 2015 A.D. After he has got over much of the surprise and awe, so common to time travelers, Stevenson is taken by some local scientists—who were expecting him, as history had recorded his achievement—on a tour of the city. Here he is interested to find that atomic power is used, and inquires when the atomic motor was invented. To his astonishment, he learns that it was invented in February, 1940, by none other than himself, Edward Stevenson!

Realizing that he must not let history down, Stevenson spends the remainder of the week in obtaining full details and plans of the atomic motor, and when he returns to 1940, sets about making an atomic motor. This he presents to humanity on February 25, 1940. And so the tale ends, leaving the problem "Who Invented the Atomic Motor?"

Stevenson did not, because he built it from the plans he obtained from the future, and the people of the future did not, because their knowledge of it was obtained via history, from Stevenson's model. But the atomic motor cannot have "just growed," so I repeat: "Who Invented the Atomic Motor?"

Congratulating AMAZING STORIES on its nearing its tenth birthday.

I remain yours sincerely,

DOUGLAS W. F. MAYER,
20 Hollin Park Rd.,
Roundmay, Leeds, England.

(There have been enough letters written about the inevitable contradictions and incompatibilities incident to stories of time travel. But this letter, a real time travel story, will give our readers something to puzzle over. It is an excellent example of

the incompatible, like the immovable body and the irresistible force paradox. Perhaps some of our readers will write some comments on this letter. EDITOR.)

A Pleasant Letter from a Young English Reader; We Shall Hope to Hear from Him Again.

Editor, AMAZING STORIES:

Just a few words of praise for your (or our) splendid magazine. I have been a regular reader since 1929, that is as regular as possible, as copies over here seem few and far between, I like the smaller size better. The best stories lately in my opinion have been: (not in the order shown) 1, "Peril Among the Drivers"; 2, "Space War"; 3, "The Sunless World"; 4, "Rape of the Solar System"; 5, "The Golden Planetoid"; 6, "Liners of Time"; 7, "The Chemistry Murder Case"; 8, "Another Dimension"; 9, "World Gone Mad"; 10, "Inner Domain."

I think your mag stands out head and shoulders above any other mag of its type. Dr. Breuer's story was doubly interesting as I am taking chemistry at college. The editorials have also helped me greatly. Anyway, I apologize for a long winded letter and hope you will keep up the good work. I hope to see more of Professor Jameson. One more thing, I disagree with Mr. W. B. (Wild Bill) Hoskins' criticism of Mr. Fearn. His "Liners of Time" was one of the finest stories I have read for a long time. As to the tray and glasses, is not the bucket full of water the same? when the bucket is swung round and round the water does not fall out. Here's wishing you a happy New Year.

I would be pleased to correspond with other readers, on any scientific subject. My age is 18.

F. MONTGOMERY,
126 Larkhall Lane,
London, S. W. 4,
England.

(A very appreciative letter from England sent to us by a young reader. We are certainly doing what we can to please a body of readers of widely varying tastes. We publish some letters of absolute disapproval, it is hard to say why some of them are written. Then we receive others taking exactly opposite views. Some of these two types make curious reading when placed in juxtaposition. The proverb says one man's meat is another man's poison, only we hope that nothing in AMAZING STORIES is to be considered poison. It is such letters as yours which may be said to smooth the path of the Editor of "your magazine," and it sometimes needs a lot of smoothing. We thank you for your good wishes. EDITOR.)

A Letter of Serious Criticism of a Very Friendly Type

Editor, AMAZING STORIES:

Having been an ardent reader of A. S. for the past seven years, I have followed with interest the advance of your magazine, and the varying expressions of opinion which have been voiced from time to time in "Discussions." Analyzed comprehensively, these expressions of opinion aim at the improvement of the publication, but they miss one factor, that is an understanding of the individuals responsible for the production of such a fascinating, instructive and thought provoking medium, to persons interested in the elusive, unfathomable scheme of things as they are.

Impartial constructive criticism, is, undoubtedly, the *only* stimulant for the creation of greater effort towards ultimate perfection, no matter on what phase of sentient existence the creative effort is focussed. In the matter of criticism, your readers would do well to pause before "rushing into print," and endeavour to visualize the thoughts activating the consciousness of the author of any story. It should be remembered that any author is limited in the expression of thought, by the imperfections of our "language medium." Let them ask themselves, have they ever been at loss for words to suitably express the thoughts or reactions created in their minds by an unusual chain of circumstances to which they have been subjected, and the answer is invariably, "yes."

Obviously then, the art of perfect self-expression can only be gained by experience and contact with *all* angles of circumstance which, collectively, we call our life, and if any author fails either by faulty science or incorrect language expression, to convey to individuals the correct interpretation of his thoughts, it is the readers' responsibility to study the incorrect statements, and if serious, make the necessary suggestions per medium of "Discussions." All criticism should be very carefully considered.

In the case of A. S. however, neither serious faulty science or incorrect language expression, are common occurrences, in fact they are comparatively rare, and when they do occur, are usually corrected by some alert science student per medium of "Discussions." Therefore since we have practically eliminated the authors as the cause of incorrect interpretation, in what direction must we look for the answer,—the Reader.

The stories contained in A. S. are based on pure science, to which is applied a very liberal coating of virile imagination, and if the reader's mind is in the least unreceptive

to these elements (literal) then his benefit in reading same is small. It is occasionally amusing to read the reactions of various readers to one particular story, and the variety of opinion can generally be determined as a different interpretation of the author's meaning. In isolated cases, though, the fault lies with the author, and it then behooves him to strive to interpret his thoughts in such a manner that they can be easily assimilated. Co-operation by both parties must result in their individual success.

I regret that this letter has reached such a length, since magazine space is valuable, however before closing (with your permission, Mr. Editor) I would like to make brief reference to the Morey controversy. I would ask all critics in this connection if they consider themselves capable of producing better drawings than Morey, from the material available in the stories for the creation of pictorial visualization; and are they one and all, qualified or gifted Cartoonists? If they are not, then they are incapable of passing judgment on Morey, though he will probably welcome any suggestions brought to his notice. The drawings are Morey's interpretation (and darn good too) of the thoughts contained in the story, and if they do not agree with Reader's views, why accuse Morey of inefficiency? Self-introspection is one of the most fascinating, instructive and beneficial studies available to us, and paves the way to personal success.

Finally, my regards to all authors, and special appreciation to Joseph W. Skidmore. His "Posi and Nega" series contain admirable logic, science and chemical biology, coated with human conception for easy assimilation, analogous to a nourishing medicinal pill administered to a recalcitrant child for its own benefit; and to T. O'Connor Sloane—MY MENTOR.

P.S. I almost forgot Neil R. Jones. Special commendation for the logic in his Prof. Jameson series.

My best wishes for future success.

ERIC WHITELEY,

1 Halston Road,
Dominion Road,
Auckland, New Zealand.

(We make a practice of commenting on the letters published in the "Discussions" Column, but we often have to say that the letter tells its own story so clearly that it leaves nothing for us to add. This is a good example of such a documentation of a reader's ideas. It is excellently presented and will be found very good reading. EDITOR.)

A Nice Appreciation from a Ten-Year-Old Reader

Editor, AMAZING STORIES:

I am ten years old and supposed to be "cracked" because I am crazy about your mag. I have just finished your June, 1935, edition. Whenever I want to read, I have to sneak out to a friend's house. "Liners of Time" was fair. "Moon of Arcturus" good, but where is the science. "The Inner World" spiffy. (Was that a himph from the editor?) Now you had better listen to my favorite authors. They are—Keller, always good. Bob Olsen, nice stories. Neil R. Jones, good space traveler. E. Binder, good stories, lots of science. There are many others, but these are best to me. Well, GMC now signing off.

GORDON MCGLOSHEN,
Box 564,
Westmont, Ill.

(When the Editor reads a letter like this he feels that he was very late in his development, for the epistle is remarkably well expressed and contains definite appreciations of authors. It is rare to find so young and good a critic. But we do not like the idea of you having to sneak out to a friend's house to read our stories. Can you not convert your guardians to your viewpoint and make them appreciate AMAZING STORIES? We are rather proud of our authors who, like so many of our friends, stick to us, as the expression is, for years. EDITOR.)

A Pleasant Letter of Appreciative Comment

Editor, AMAZING STORIES:

It seems as if you liked December better than any other month of the year. I say this because the December issues of 1933, 1934 and 1935 had better stories than any other of the past three years. I also think the "comet-tail" title adds to the appearance of good old AMAZING. I have noticed that you are combining issues. Are you going to continue this permanently or are you just skipping a few issues? Where is the serial in the October and December issues? The old "Mag" doesn't seem the same without a serial. I recently started my second year of High School. I have a science-fiction author for the Art Class. His name is Stephen S. Hale. I believe he is going to submit a story for your consideration soon. In comments on a letter signed by Bill Bowling in the December issue, you say that the magazine may be increased in size. Do you mean more pages or is the larger size of page returning? I hope the latter. I am closing with a plea: more stories by Keller and Williamson.

ROBERT G. MADLE,
333 E. Belgrade St.,
Philadelphia, Pa.

(The editorial staff of this magazine give enough thought and consideration to the work to make such a letter as yours very acceptable. It is a comfort to hear that you like serials. More are coming. What you tell about your author of science-fiction in the Art Class is interesting. We shall look him up in the Authors' Record. We hope to give more pages rather than to increase their size.—EDITOR.)

A Letter of Advice on How AMAZING STORIES should be edited

Editor, AMAZING STORIES:

This missive must act as a medium through which I must unleash the pent-up rage of the last several years of reading science-fiction. If you are ever to come near the top in science-fiction, stop, look and listen to the following pleas. 1, 2, 3, 4. Please, Mr. Editor, please bring the letters in Discussions up to date. Three or four months after the letters are written, they appear in the department. 5. Please put such stories as "Hoffman's Widow" in the same place you put this letter. 6. No serials other than those which can be written in three issues of A. S. 7. Trimmed edges. 8. More colors to Morey's covers. Aside from this the stories in the Feb issue were the most deplorable ever read by this stf. fan. Feb cover is passable. April cover is great!! What happened to Morey's colors did they get mixed up? AMAZING STORIES should go under the oft suggested title "weird tales," it is more suitable to the type of story found inside the covers. Until AMAZING STORIES (alias "Weird Tales") again becomes a science-fiction magazine, I rest my plea.

E. R. NOGUERE,
3021 Faconia Ave.,
New York, N. Y.

(In your reference to the place where "Hoffman's Widow" should go, we presume the cryptic reference is to the waste paper basket. Your letter is too amusing to meet such a fate as you hint at. Your letter is dated Jan. 30, 1936. This answer is being typed on February 6th. You see there is no delay in this case. "Hoffman's Widow" won its place in our columns by its merit; we publish many stories that have little science in them and others that have more. It would be poor practice to take a title from another magazine, in accordance with your suggestion. The other magazine people would certainly object.—EDITOR.)

The Raven Criticises some of our Stories, the Four Best

Editor, AMAZING STORIES:

For the last two years I have read every issue of AMAZING STORIES. As far as criticising the stories in the magazine, on the whole, they are excellent. I haven't a grudge against any one of them. "The Inner World" was a bit dry, but was good in parts.

I am writing from my laboratory now. The best four stories I have read so far are—"Music of The Spheres," "The Green Star Planet," "Liners of Time" and "Moon of Arcturus."

"THE RAVEN,"

19 Grahame Street,
Auckland C1, New Zealand.

(Your letter is of special interest as a contribution to the ornithology of New Zealand. We believe that ravens attain many years of life, so we can wish you "the same," as the expression goes. We receive many letters from readers in the Antipodes. Write again some time.—EDITOR.)

An Encouraging Letter from Montana

Editor, AMAZING STORIES:

Keep up the steady rate of improvement that you have made in the last several months, and it won't be long before A. S. is leading in science fiction. Comet tail title, cover designs by Morey, editorials, and improving stories are making AMAZING STORIES a first class magazine. I would like an interplanetary space story once in a while and also an occasional Professor Jameson story. For the present I think your magazine is sure swell. Don't be discouraged by criticisms.

FRANCIS ENGLISH,
307 A South Jackson,
Butte, Montana.

(A most encouraging letter from the far West. We not only "bear up" under criticisms but feel that in a way they are inspiring us to "rise on stepping stones of our dead selves to higher things." Only we do not admit that we are dead, but Tennyson does express it nicely. EDITOR.)

An Interesting Letter About the English of Different Regions

Editor, AMAZING STORIES:

I liked the stories in the February issue, they had variety, but I can't say as much for the December issue. Well you can't please all of the people all of the time but I guess you please most of the people most of the time.

I see where I came in for a little rap on the knuckles from Geoffrey Welks in the February issue. Perhaps it was justified. I probably should have explained, Mr. Welks, that I make a distinction between "argot" and "slang." I consider "skoits" and "frails" as argot and as such I agree with you in that they have no place in either your language or mine. There isn't such a great deal of difference between English as you speak it and as I speak it, but there is a difference,

which accounts for my purely personal opinion in liking "American-English"; and the same reason probably accounts for your liking your English. I certainly don't blame you; so after all I guess we haven't anything to argue about and probably neither of us is qualified to debate on the English language. I was surprised that any letter from me was capable of marring the perfect issue of AMAZING STORIES. Come, Mr. Welks, what do you say we be friends? After all we are both A. S. fans.

You must be commended, Dr. Sloane, for this month's (Feb.) discussion column; the editorial comments were very explanatory and liberal. With best wishes and hopes for a quick return to a monthly issue, I am,

Very sincerely yours,

C. HAMILTON BLOOMER, JR.,
180 Townsend St.,
San Francisco, Calif.

(There are certainly, even in the United States, distinctive pronunciations, perhaps hardly enough to be called dialects and naturally there is a quantity of slang of different habitats. Little England has preserved a number of very distinctive dialects, recently a bible in the Sussex Dialect has been published and the curious point about it is that the dialect in question resembles the dialect of the American negro. But a distinction must be drawn between dialect and slang, the first being a true language and the other no language at all.—EDITOR.)

Editor, AMAZING STORIES:

I have about thirty (30) Amazing Monthlies and Quarterlies for sale. Write for prices.

I have enjoyed such stories as "Skylark Three" and "Troyanna."

ROBERT PETERSON,
1321 Garfield,
Laramie, Wyoming.

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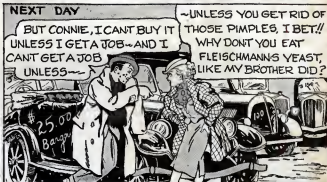
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